POLITICAL THEOLOGIES AND DEVELOPMENT IN ASIA

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Transcendence, sacrifice, and aspiration

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GIUSEPPE BOLOTTA, PHILIP FOUNTAIN, AND R. MICHAEL FEENER (EDS)

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Political theologies and development in Asia

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Political theologies and development in Asia

Transcendence, sacrifice, and aspiration

Edited by

Giuseppe Bolotta, Philip Fountain,

and R. Michael Feener

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COVER IMAGE: Parade of mourners for the 'Development King' at the Temple of the Emerald Buddha (Wat Phra Kaew), Bangkok 2017. Photo by R. Michael Feener.

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For Silvia Vignato and Robin Bush

Contents

List of figures *page* ix
Notes on contributors x
Preface xv

1 Transcendence, sacrifice, and aspiration: the political theology of development in Asia 1
Giuseppe Bolotta, Philip Fountain, and R. Michael Feener

2 East of Westphalia: shaping the body-politic via institutional charisma 18
Armando Salvatore

3 The yogic ethic and the spirit of development 40
Sunila S. Kale and Christian Lee Novetzke

4 Managing Karbala: genealogies of Shiʿa humanitarianism in Pakistan, England, and Iraq 55
Till Mostowlansky

5 From blood, cast in cement: materialising the political in Thailand 68
Eli Elinoff

6 The theopolitics of art: Qur'anic objects and their publics in Indonesia 87
Kenneth M. George

7 Embodying the late King: Buddhist salvation and the sacrifice of sovereignty at a Bangkok mall 104
Edoardo Siani

8 Being alone: the political theology of the development citizen 119
Sam Han

Notes 133
Bibliography 141
Index 165

Figures

6.1 A page from the manuscript. Sura 114, A*n-Naas* ('Humanity') from the *Al-Qur'an Mushaf Istiqlal*. Reproduced by permission of the Yayasan Festival Istiqlal. *page* 95

6.2 The Lagerfeld bustier. Detail from an unattributed photograph appearing in the *Brisbane Courier-Mail*, Saturday 22 January 1994. 99

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Preface

Over recent years we have observed with great interest developments in the burgeoning field of political theology. The vibrant re-emergence of debates about the ways in which religious ideals, cosmological paradigms, doctrinal discourses, and ritual practices continue to shape public politics, even in its most apparently secular forms, has broad-ranging implications for conversations across religious studies, political science and international relations, anthropology, history, philosophy, law, and of course theology. We view the rise of this literature as a decisive marker of the state of critical scholarship in the early twenty-first century. As, justifiably, the social sciences have largely abandoned previously popular theories of 'secularisation', academic analysis has moved beyond assumptions about religion's impending and inevitable demise. Facing the rapid rise in influence of religious politics across both 'East' and 'West', and acknowledging the stubbornly 'religious' shape of so many of our contemporary political processes, scholars have begun to wrestle with the profound analytical challenges of tracing the 'theological' in unexpected places across the contemporary world. This shift in tenor and focus has been, in our estimation, a valuable step forward in political analysis. It proffers remarkable opportunities for new insights into core questions of political association, social normativity, multiple modernities, and religious affordances. But the full potentialities of this scholarship have, we suggest, yet to be realised.

Investigations into political theology began within European contexts in which the key issues at stake were the legacies and impacts of Judeo-Christian theology and Greco-Roman culture on the secularising post-Westphalian and post-Reformation nation-state. The Weimar-era German jurist Carl Schmitt is, of course, central to this story. While political theological analysis has expanded beyond Schmitt's initial stimulus in

important ways, the main thrust remains deeply concerned with Western contexts and (post-)Christian theologies. Other contexts and other religious legacies have, however, largely remained unexamined to date.

Political theological analysis has also tended to embrace methodologies from the fields of philosophy or jurisprudential scholarship. Consequently, the primary modes of investigation have paid insufficient attention to the ways in which political theological dynamics are worked out and embodied differently in quotidian practices. In a sense, and perhaps ironically, this reflects some of the ways in which the discipline of (Christian) theology itself has privileged conversations with philosophy over disciplines like anthropology and sociology, which have emphasised the diversity of human experience and, to a greater or lesser degree, sought to examine how broader political and economic changes have influenced everyday life in particular social contexts. Anthropology in particular has, over the second half of the twentieth century, come to privilege ethnographic participant observation of such dimensions of human experience as an almost sacramental methodological commitment. In this volume, we have assembled a collection of studies to highlight some of the ways in which such a concern with everyday political theologies can serve as a necessary and constructive correlative to the abstract philosophical impetus that has dominated most recent work on political theology. Based upon the material presented here, we argue that the quotidian and the philosophical are rightly imagined as dynamic collaborative partners in political theological analysis – and that as such they demand more scholarly attention.

Political theologies and development in Asia is premised on the assertion that analysis of the politics of development in Asia is a particularly promising locus for re-invigorating political theological analysis today to creatively pioneer new theoretical and research trajectories. The emphasis on Asia refocuses attention beyond the North Atlantic and Christian traditions. The focus on development in this volume is, moreover, selected specifically to complicate any simplistic juxtaposition of 'Asian' and 'European' political theologies. In this book we seek to establish development as a primary site for political theological analyses into the future, which necessarily entails a study of cultural, political, economic, and religious entanglements between multi-polar and non-conventional historical trajectories.

Our emphasis on development here may nonetheless strike seasoned analysts of political theology as unusual. However, we are not the first to suggest this convergence as valuable and compelling. Over the past few decades some of the most astute and innovative analysts of diverse projects relating to state-led development, humanitarianism, NGOs, and

human rights have intimated toward political theology as a potential rubric for deepening our understanding of how developmental ideologies work in practice. In this book we draw upon these suggestive comments to explore more directly and more thoroughly what a political theology framework can contribute to the study of development.

This book emerged from a highly collaborative research project on Religion and Development in Asia that was convened under R. Michael Feener's leadership of the Religion Cluster at the National University of Singapore's Asia Research Institute (ARI). We are grateful to numerous colleagues who participated in the dynamic and creative discussions around these issues that characterised the cluster over the best part of a decade, including Julius Bautista, Anne Blackburn, Bernardo Brown, Gustav Brown, Martin van Bruinessen, Robin Bush, Kenneth Dean, Prasenjit Duara, Lily Kong, Cho Kyuhoon, Amelia Fauzia, Joshua Gedacht, Julia Huang-Lemmon, Jeremy Kingsley, Liang Yongjia, Till Mostowlansky, May Ngo, David Palmer, Anthony Reid, Jeffrey Samuels, Catherine Scheer, Ronojoy Sen, Tosa Keiko, Wu Keping, Zhong Yijiang, and Zuoshi Aga. We are grateful for the support of the Asia Research Institute and its staff for our many different conferences, symposia, book discussions, seminars, and fieldwork trips that fed into and enabled our collaboration to be as productive as it was. The goal of our work in the Religion Cluster was to produce new empirical studies of the intersections of religion and development in Asia, and also to provide new analytical tools to help in better understanding these relationships.

Political theologies and development in Asia should be read as the third instalment in a trilogy of volumes that emerged out of this broader project at ARI's Religion Cluster. Each book in this trilogy asserts the necessity of attending to political analysis in the investigation of religion and development in Asia. The earlier two books – *Religion and the Politics of Development*, edited by Philip Fountain, Robin Bush, and R. Michael Feener, and *The Mission of Development: Religion and Techno-politics in Asia*, edited by Catherine Scheer, Philip Fountain, and R. Michael Feener – broke new ground in establishing themes of religion and politics as inseparable from the study of development, even in its most apparently secular and technocratic iterations. This current volume builds upon the arguments advanced in these earlier books while also exploring new analytical approaches.

Like the earlier volumes, this book also emerged out of ARI's remarkably productive capacity to convene and conduct international conferences. The meeting on 'Political Theologies and Development in Asia' was held in Singapore at ARI in February 2017. We are deeply grateful to the exceptional ARI staff, especially Valerie Yeo, Sharon Ong,

Tay Minghua, and Henry Kwan for their outstanding work in organising the event. This book has greatly benefited from the conversations during the conference with scholars who generously shared their thoughts and questions. We would thus like to extend our thanks to all participants, especially to Bernardo Brown, Gustav Brown, Robin Bush, Amelia Fauzia, Amoz Hor, Peter A. Jackson, Nursyazwani Jamaludin, Lei Kuan Rongdao Lai, Mok Mei Feng, Jonathan Rigg, Teresita Cruz-Del Rosario, Catherine Scheer, and V.J. Varghese.

This volume and the conference out of which it originated would not have been possible without the generous support from the Asia Research Institute and the Henry R. Luce Foundation to whom we would like to express our sincere gratitude. Jonathan Rigg at ARI and Toby Volkman at Luce have been wonderful supporters and colleagues over the whole duration of this project. As editors, we would also like to thank the contributors of this volume who have undertaken such innovative analysis of political theology, and from whom we have learned a great deal in the course of our collaborations. We are also grateful for the professional and friendly editorial staff at Manchester University Press, and particularly to Jon de Peyer, for their interest in this work and for all of their help in bringing this book to publication.

Giuseppe Bolotta
Philip Fountain
R. Michael Feener

1

Transcendence, sacrifice, and aspiration: the political theology of development in Asia

Giuseppe Bolotta, Philip Fountain, and R. Michael Feener

Scholarship on political theology has made important interventions toward deconstructing the official script of secularism and revealing the 'secular conversion' of a Christian ethos into the constitutional-juridical scaffolding of modern nation-states (Schmitt, 2005; Lefort, 2006). In the context of Enlightenment Europe, political theology developed a number of critical analytical tools to 'unmake' the secular fiction of political modernity. Recognising that political theology discourse emerged as a transgressive, deviant expression of modern thinking, we argue that the employment of these analytical tools outside of Europe is promising, including in contexts where the project of secularism has historically proved less effective, produced unintended consequences, and favoured the multiplication of alternative 'theological secularities'. It is for this reason that this volume focuses on Asia. But a shift beyond Western modernity is not simply a rejection of previous articulations of political theology. European and Asian modernities are bound together through genealogical, institutional, and theo-political entanglements and our analysis of each must take into account this long history of global interactions. Our focus on development – conceptualised here as a set of transnational networks of ideas and practices that connect geographically disparate locations in complex political and religious entanglements – seeks to resituate the objects and locations of political theological analysis within a more expansive horizon. As the chapters in this volume will demonstrate, just as political theology scholarship stands to benefit from new critical attention to development in Asia, so too the critical analysis of 'modernity' and 'development' in Asia gains new traction through active engagement with political theology. We argue that a political theology of

development will especially benefit from careful examination of themes of transcendence, sacrifice and victimhood, and aspiration and salvation.

The theological foundations of the political

Scholarship on political theology has not only revealed the elusive character of the separation between religion and politics as has been thought to be characteristic of Western modernity, but it also addresses 'the political'[1] as intrinsically and ontologically theological. Without providing any essentialist definition of 'the political', prominent scholars in political theology are mostly preoccupied with 'perturbing' the rationalistic framing of modern political theory through 'theological' considerations. According to scholars like Claude Lefort (2006), Paul Kahn (2011), and Harald Wydra (2015), for example, the political is not solely reflected by politics[2] – that is, administration, policies, and the various juridical-institutional arrangements which regulate political authority and state sovereignty. More fundamentally, 'the political' refers to the hidden symbolic principles and sources of 'truth' (the theological) that generate different forms of society; transcend the institutional fabric of everyday politics; and give normative meanings, shape, and stage to historically situated modes of collective life and individual experience. The theological foundations of politics enable the possibility of social coexistence by connecting power to the limits and finitude of human experience. The 'transcendent' legitimation of 'immanent' sovereignty – this is an important point to be stressed – might or might not refer to God or gods, even if traditionally religions have provided the kind of metaphysical assumptions political power is founded on, both within and beyond Christian Europe.

Weimar-era political theorist Carl Schmitt (2005) identified the theological foundation of the political in the fundamental binary distinction between friends and enemies, whereas the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben (1998), drawing on Schmitt, has provided a reading of sovereign power as an historical production of 'states of exception' and *homini sacri*, the latter being an exceptional figure in Roman law that is set apart as both sacred and accursed. The theological foundations of the political inform questions related to the limits and ultimate ends of human conditions, what Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985) name 'empty signifiers'. The 'emptiness' of the domain addressed by these questions – the fact that questions of salvation, death, life, or God are so large as to escape definitive and final closure – makes the theological an ontologically open and contested field. Across considerable differences of cultural

context and historical change, however, we observe processes through which – as Hent De Vries (2006: 46) points out – the anxieties of cosmic indeterminacy become 'dogmatically fixated, socially reified, and aesthetically fetishized' as 'the only Universal Truth' and source of authority. Or, as Wydra (2015: 10) puts it: 'Voids of meaning have to be kept in check by transcendental signifiers, symbols and ritual.' Indeed, 'the extraordinary' for Wydra plays a decisive role, such that people 'require transcendent images that express the eternity of their collective groups and the world'. These might be 'religious' or 'secular'. They might refer to God(s), 'the People' (*demos*), Dharma, science, civilisation, human rights, the market, or development – each taking on new valences when observed as elements of particular political theologies.

For Lefort (2006) the theological-political is located at the crossroads between the transcendent Other (the end of life and the realm beyond life) and the immanent One (the necessary illusion of the unity of the body-politic). The theological signifier of sovereignty, in other words, symbolically generates power as a mediator between the One and the Other, in ways that facilitate a certain configuration of political authority and general understanding of social reality to become experienced and accepted as legitimate and 'natural' by its subjects. Political theology thus requires us to consider a set of concepts that are commonly excluded from modern political theory but which nevertheless greatly contribute to shape our political imagination, such as faith, sacrifice, and the sacred (Kahn, 2011: 8). In analysing state violence against the enemy, war-making political rhetoric, and all the practices of legal exceptions related to the defence of modern sovereign existence, Khan for instance puts sacrifice, rather than social contract and reasonable agreement, at the origins of the (modern American) political community. The patriotic willingness to die, the 'ultimate sacrifice' (Kahn, 2011: 7) for the nation, is grounded on faith rather than policy.

We argue that an optic of political theology that recognises the sacred as fundamental to the establishment of worldly power can be useful in framing affective, aesthetic, and unconscious dimensions of socio-political imagination, including what political theorist Benjamin Arditi (2007), drawing on Freud, has called 'the return of the repressed', and Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin (1968) referred to as humanity's 'cosmic fear'. In these frames, elements such as desire, aspiration, hope, seduction, and existential anxiety are recognised as driving forces in the theological dynamics of political subjectivity – ranging from the hope for radical change and spiritual elevation informing nineteenth-century notions of progress, and the emotional fervour triggering ultra-rightist anti-migrant political rhetoric, to the outpouring of sentiment by Singapore's citizens

during Lee Kuan Yew's national funeral in 2015. These can all be seen as modes of action, thought, and feeling that unveil the eruption of the theological-political into purportedly immanent and 'secular' everyday politics, including the politics of development.

Differently from conventional political theory, the use of political theology can reveal the ways in which, as Thomas Molnar (1988) expresses it, politics and the sacred work as 'twin powers'. This volume examines their complex entanglements in processes of governance and 'development' in Asia, illustrating the theoretical productivity of a decentralised, postcolonial political theology.

Our work here attempts to expand the framing of political theology outside of 'the West', pioneering analyses of the political-theological nexus in Asia. The chapters collected in this volume investigate historically situated, non-linear entanglements between religion, politics, and development through the lens of political theology, in contexts ranging from Thailand (Edoardo Siani and Eli Elinoff) and South Korea (Sam Han) to India (Sunila Kale and Christian Lee Novetzke) and Indonesia (Kenneth George), as well as in reference to wider transnational spaces and multivectored genealogies as the Islamic ecumene to the 'East of Westphalia' (Armando Salvatore) and Twelver Shiʿa humanitarian networks across Asia, Europe, and Africa (Till Mostowlansky).

From a genealogical and historiographical point of view, the translation of political theology insights into analyses of Asian developmental modernities might be suspected of being yet another orientalist operation (Said, 1978). A few epistemological clarifications are thus in order. First, unlike some Christian theologians (e.g. Pieris, 2003; Kwok, 2016), for 'political theology' we do not exclusively or necessarily mean 'political Christianity' or 'Christian secularity' in Asia. Although we recognise the Euro-American and Christian genealogy of the concept as well as the valuable contribution of contemporary theologians to this increasingly plural field of scholarship, we are here proposing a decentralised and postcolonial political theology, to rethink its scope and analytical value beyond just 'Christendom'. Second, and relatedly, despite its etymological foundations, we are not bounded to any monotheistic formulation of *theos*. Instead, our 'theological' approach to 'the political' embraces polytheistic, monotheistic, animistic, as well as non-theistic and officially secular frameworks of power sacralisation, without requiring these to be mutually exclusive possibilities. This is particularly important in the context of Asian political and development formations, where it is often exceedingly difficult to draw sharp dividing lines between religion(s) and state institutions, supernatural forces and modernity, neoliberal capitalism and millennial cosmologies. Finally, a historiographical note on

political-geographical nomenclatures is needed. Although we refer to 'Asia' and 'Asian' political theologies out of convenience, we fully acknowledge the embeddedness of such categories in twentieth-century Western (confessional) imperialism and colonial imagination. Our take on political theology thus reworks normative, 'Occidental' historiography by re-tracing non-linear, multi-directional, and trans-confessional entanglements within 'Asia' and between 'Asia' and elsewhere (Hodgson, 1993; Duara, 2015). This volume, therefore, deliberately expands the analytical boundaries of conventional scholarship on 'political theology', 'development', 'religion', and 'politics', grounding these concepts in a variety of different areas of research. As we show, the theoretical space opened up by this expansion is empirically filled with historically deep, culturally rich, and illuminating cross-comparisons that provide innovative perspectives on the theo-political and the (re)making of Asia.

Asian political theologies?

Even though political theology as a body of scholarship was born in Europe and has focused primarily on the relationship between sovereignty and Christianity, we argue that the genealogical, functional, and cosmological interrelation between politics and Christianity is just one of the possible arrangements that the theological-political can take. Within European history itself the theological-political has undergone radical re-articulations with the passage from its incarnation in the king's 'two bodies', as argued by Ernst Kantorowicz (1957), to its modern disincorporation, migration, and reincarnation into 'secular' notions such as 'democracy', 'the Law', 'progress', or 'the people'. Even when political theology scholarship has been used on more explicitly 'confessional' formations, such as in the analysis of political-religious movements of Latin American liberation theology (e.g. Sobrino, 2002; Bolotta, 2017a), it can still shed light on particular configurations of the theological-political that might analogously be tracked in non-Christian political religions, such as in various historical and contemporary strands of socially engaged Buddhism (Queen and King, 1996) and political Islam (Turner, 2002).

As in medieval Europe, also in pre-modern Southeast Asia political power was derived from a hierarchy taken as the earthly manifestation of a cosmic order (Keyes, 1994). Well before the appearance of significant encounters and interactions with European influences, Asian political theologies presented varying degrees of historical distinctiveness, and encompassed differently situated articulations of symbolic processes, economic practices, and ethno-linguistic forms of life. While the theological

foundations of European political orders have been symbolically and ritually filled with different strands of Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian themes, in pre-modern Southeast Asia the king's 'two bodies' were spiritually and politically animated primarily by Hindu-Buddhist cosmologies.

Stanley Tambiah (1977) famously coined the notion of 'galactic' or 'mandalic' polities to represent the design of pre-modern Southeast Asian kingdoms, a design that coded in a composite way cosmological, topographical, and politico-economic features. The gravitational centre of Indic galactic kingdoms was the *devaraja* – a 'God-King' – as the incarnation of the Hindu deity Indra, located between the heavens and the world of men.[3] For Clifford Geertz (1980), this Brahamanic conceptualisation of kingship was a fundamental source of political legitimacy and charismatic power in pre-modern Southeast Asian 'theatre states'. In the case of Siam, the king was not only the Hindu 'world-conqueror' (*devaraja*) but also the Buddhist 'world-renouncer' (*dhammaraja*), the embodiment of the Dharma (Tambiah, 1977). The double nature of the king as both 'world conqueror' and 'world renouncer' in turn provided the 'theological' bases for the socio-economical and geo-political organisation of the kingdom.

It should be noted that the diversity of cosmological groundings of state formations in pre-modern Southeast Asia encompassed not only Indic, but also indigenous and Abrahamic conceptualisations. For example, Anthony Milner (1983) characterises the Muslim states of Southeast Asia in the pre-modern archipelago as 'an expanding galaxy of Persianised Muslim Sultanates whose rulers exercised a system similar to that of the region's pre-Islamic "sacral kings" paired with Sufi theological conceptions such as the "Perfect Man" (*insan al-kamil*)'. Michael Feener (1994) has argued for an even wider range of ways in which Islamic cosmologies were interpreted and deployed across the region in the early modern period in association with forms of contractual, as well as absolutist Muslim polities in the eastern islands of the Indonesian archipelago.

Over more recent history, Western political theologies have come to exercise a remarkable influence outside Europe, including across Asia. These theological-political doctrines constitute fundamental dimensions of the West's colonial and post-colonial interventions in (and beyond) Asia. Among post-colonial actors, development organisations, humanitarian agencies, and NGOs represent one set of important vectors of interaction (Fountain et al., 2015). Flows along these developmental routes are not, of course, unilateral or uncontested. Instead, modern development discourse and practice has afforded space for multiple and non-linear pathways of global encounters. Through development, a range of religious traditions have provided cross-cultural networks of historical

connection, confrontation, and intervention. Rather than producing political homogeneity, local (re)interpretations of Western modernity rooted in particular Christian historical trajectories ultimately gave rise to a multiplicity of diverging 'secularities', 'modernities', 'developments', and political theologies.

Several chapters in this volume provide historically informed analyses of these hybridising encounters between local and global political-theological formations, revealing the multi-polar genealogies and heterogeneous characterisations of modernity and development in both 'Asia' and the 'West'. Salvatore's chapter offers a ground-breaking political-theological analysis of modern state formations by examining the roles of religious knowledge, symbols, and charisma in the production of political modernity from a radically de-centred sociological position – the 'Islamic ecumene in the East of Westphalia'. His interrogation of 'the religiopolitical nexus' since the late Middle Ages de-centres Eurocentric, Latin-Christian historical accounts and revisits the ontologies of historical sociology by way of a critical focus on Islam's different – and neglected – political-theological contributions to modernity. By looking at the religiopolitical nexus from this de-centred position, Salvatore reveals the intertwinement of pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial realities, as well as the entanglements of diverse historical experiences across Western, Central, and Southern Asia. His contribution helps us to recognise the relationship of historical (dis)continuity and exchange between an 'Asian, Muslim political theology', grounded on a 'saintly charism' and providing cohesion to relatively independent religiopolitical networks, and the European, centralised, 'Leviathan-model of sacral sanctioning of sovereignty'.

Kale and Novetzke's chapter on the political theology of yoga provides another compelling, de-centring analysis of modernity and development, in this case through the optic of Indian Vedic thought and – in particular – the enduring legacy of Gandhi's political reading of yoga. Through a critical analysis of the changing political-theological expressions of the concept of yoga since its first appearance in the Rg Veda (c. 1900 BCE) to its contemporary value as part of Indian Prime Minister Modi's political economy, Kale and Novetzke clearly show how 'the connection between yoga, power, and politics is as old as the practice of yoga itself'. While Modi has coupled yoga with Western-style development and capitalistic expansion, the political theology of Gandhi's karma yoga represents a 'theological alternative' to the project of Western development as grounded on the collective. As the authors argue, 'The karma yogi's philosophy of development is to return to the sovereignty of the self – wherein development begins with the freedom of the individual. This is not only an Indic extension of the idea of yoga, but it is

also Gandhi's political resistance to colonial and postcolonial Western developmentalism.' Here, transnational development imaginaries become entangled in both practices of adoption and rejection via the reworking of the ancient practices of yoga.

Both these chapters look at non-Western conceptions of development through the lens of political theology. At the same time, they look at political theology from the perspective of particular historical experiences in 'Asia' – an operation of 'decentring' which opens up innovative theoretical possibilities as well as new critical understandings of established analytical categories. Like Salvatore's analysis of Islamic political theology, Kale and Novetzke's approach reveals an inversion of the linear paradigm (religious to secular) as established in classic political theology literature insofar as, in their reading, yoga was originally formulated as a 'secular', warrior doctrine and has only recently become a mode of 'spirituality'. Moreover, both these chapters, among other contributions to this volume, examine development and developmentalist state projects as particularly important sites in which to analyse historically situated political-theological formations in Asia.

Transcendence, sacrifice, and aspiration

Development has not yet become a significant locus in debates about political theology. Indeed, the possibility of such an analysis has been largely neglected by both scholars of development and political theology alike. Against this disinterest, we argue that the political theology of development represents a particularly productive field of exploration for critically analysing contemporary conjunctures of religion and politics. Building on a series of earlier forays in which we have sought to analyse religion and development in Asia, this volume seeks to establish the political theology of development as an invaluable analytical approach in the study of development.[4] Our concern in this section is to outline the key three political theological themes that are interwoven throughout this volume: transcendence, sacrifice and victimhood, and aspiration and salvation.

Genealogically, modern 'Big D' development as it emerged in the wake of the Second World War built on the theo-politics of European empires, in which violent and exploitative relationships were justified by religious ethics and divine mandate. During decolonisation and the institutionalisation of the modern nation-state across Asia, development – including its relative presence, absence, and potentiality – emerged as a central category shaping geopolitical imaginations. The extraordinary

power of development, as Jonathan Crush (1995) has argued, is in its capacity to imagine new worlds, and thereby reshape the present. To a remarkable extent, we all now live in the shadow of a developmentally-infused cosmos. European imperialism involved complex entanglements of political control, economic expansion, and the pursuit of Christian missionary agendas. Though this was often a fraught and contested relationship, the association itself is not insignificant. Michael Barnett (2011), Peter Stamatov (2013), and Thomas Davies (2014) have each argued that the practices of contemporary NGOs were born out of missionary movements of the earlier centuries, in which a universal humanity became imaginable and then made practicable through vast networks and flows of ideas, information, and people. Missionaries were influential political actors across Asia, including in all kinds of interventions that would come to be recognised within the rubric of secular 'development' (Scheer et al., 2018).

These early religious influences have had an enduring and significant effect on parts of the contemporary development sector (Fountain, 2015). But with the rise of development through the long twentieth century, religion has also been profoundly reconfigured (Feener and Fountain, 2018). In the age of development, diverse religious formations across Asia have undergone broad transformations along a number of new trajectories. Institutionally, we can witness the rise of the NGO as a major organisational innovation. Accompanying these new organisational practices came a slew of new logics about what kinds of interventions should be made as well as how they should be enacted and assessed. Indeed, development has inspired new forms of agency, with humanity being endowed with enormous power, as well as heightened expectancy, to bring about a better life in this world. Development thereby also has inaugurated new temporalities as diverse traditions came to reimagine their own pasts while constructing new visions of the future. These changes can be traced from the personal and affective through the communal and national to the global.

Such long-standing and mutually transforming entanglements are highly influential for our analysis of the political theology of development. Such an investigation is based on the assumption that diverse religious traditions and diverse developmental formations, practices, and imaginations are always already intermeshed. Our discussion of three key themes for a political theological analysis of development – transcendence, sacrifice and victimhood, and aspiration and salvation – builds on this understanding of a complex history of entanglements.

The transcendence of development has recently begun attracting scholarly attention. Stephen Hopgood (2013) argues that the notion of

universal humanity underpinning human rights must be accessed via a political theological analysis. Nick Cullather (2010), discussing America's 'green revolution' in Asia, suggests that the 'miracle of modernisation' was not mere rhetoric – it constituted a thoroughgoing apotheosis of technology as the means for achieving mass material salvation. While scholars including Philip Quarles van Ufford and Matthew Schoffeleers (1988), Gilbert Rist (1997), and Oscar Salemink (2015) have all argued that development itself constitutes a new religion, and can be productively analysed with the methodological and analytical tools deployed in the investigation of religion. Analyses of the enchanted and magical cosmologies of development thus open new ways to understand how development works (Fountain, 2013).

In the twenty-first century new attention has also been given to development's dark shadow, as the climate change crisis has increasingly assumed a central role in global concerns about our collective future (Northcott, 2013). Accelerating environmental threats place new demands for urgent political action against the backdrop of an apocalyptic futuristic imaginary. The challenge of the changing climate can be met by either utopian or dystopian visions (Hjerpe and Linnér, 2009), with the former placing great faith in technological solutions to save us from this time of trial and the latter imagining the climate as a malevolent transcendence, imbuing an increasingly dismal sense of foreboding and dread.

In this volume, a number of the chapters advance nuanced new analyses of the 'religion of development'. Sam Han's assessment of South Korea's developmental politics pays close attention to reconfiguring notions of citizenship, which he argues should be understood as a form of 'spiritualised nationalism'. These dynamics are traced through emergent South Korean media discourses and television shows that proffer 'therapeutic' solutions to proliferating problems that have arisen out of Korea's remarkable achievement in development. In Han's study, a spiritual turn is in large part produced by economic success – which is here discussed as epiphenomenal to East Asia's 'compressed modernity'.

Just as religion has been multiply configured as a locus of transcendence, development has also been anything but static and fixed. Instead, both terms should be understood as 'moving targets' (Feener et al., 2015). They are shape-shifters, being reconfigured as they journey across time and space. Development, like religion, is multiple. While the IMF's Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), Amnesty International's advocacy for LGBT rights, Tzu Chi's Buddhist humanitarianism, and China's industrialisation can all be seen as participating in the nebulous world of 'development', it is equally clear that not all

development is the same. And yet emphasising disjuncture can be overplayed. For development is a compelling site of analysis because of the ways in which it 'crosses over', intimating toward the universal. In so doing, it has become a space in which cultures and religions meet, and where they are reconfigured. This aspirational universality is, itself, a matter for political theological analysis – for it points to multiple and shifting transcendent horizons.

Tending the light of development's transcendence is a vast army of bureaucrats, scholars, and managers that collectively compose a powerful 'priesthood'. Joseph Stiglitz (2002) and Robert Nelson (2001) have described economists in precisely this language; they are a new 'priesthood' with fundamentalist proclivities. Divine powers are also attributed to technocrats to engineer society in desired directions. Timothy Mitchell (2002: 15) has identified them in the form of modern 'experts' who come to voice the truths of the transcendent ideals of modernity and progress. Development is rendered transcendent via the rituals, discourses, and practices enacted by this priesthood.

Sacrifice, similarly, has been recognised by Susan Mizruchi (1998: 100) as a 'preoccupation of moderns' – defining a central trope in nineteenth- and twentieth-century social science discourse, as well as in the literary works of major American authors ranging from Melville to Henry James. In his recent comparative study of sacrifice, David Weddle (2017: 208) emphasises that: 'Its usefulness as the justifying rationale for violence in religious conflicts and political contests is invaluable.' The powerful idea of sacrifice has, however, been understood and deployed in an astoundingly wide range of different ways.[5] For example, Didier Fassin (2012) has argued that Western humanitarianism is permeated by a 'politics of life' and a 'politics of suffering'. Both are reconfigured Christian political theologies, as well as secular spheres of responsibility, authority, and redemption. The sacrifice of the crucifixion has, for Fassin, been transmogrified into a valuation of compassion for those suffering, and this helps assuage the guilt of the wealthy in a profoundly unequal world. In a somewhat different vein, sacrifice is often associated with war-making, and the remembrance of war dead. The role of the state in enacting and legitimating violence – including in the name of development – is a crucial feature of contemporary politics. Sacrificial language is also evoked for economic and developmental purposes. This is particularly striking in diverse contexts across Asia, as echoed in the appeals by leaders of Singapore's People's Action Party to the necessity of sacrifice for Singapore's economic advancement, and the national valorisation of overseas Filipino maids hailed for their 'sacrificial heroism' – making them, in Julius Bautista's (2015) terms, 'export-quality martyrs'.

Victimhood is likewise a central concept for development, from a framing of victims as suspects to one in which their suffering 'excites sympathy and merits compensation' (Fassin and Rechtman, 2009). This shift in the moral economy of suffering has reshaped the discourses and practices of development, legitimating new forms of governmentality. Importantly, not all victims are equal, and some categories of victimhood assume a sacred character that demands intervention (Bolotta, forthcoming a). The new moral salience of victimhood also changes relationships between givers and receivers.[6] Although the victim is endowed with a potent valence, it is the givers – humanitarians, celebrities, individual donors, wealthy benefactors, and communities – who are bestowed with the agency to 'save' others. This salvific capacity, vividly described by Peter Redfield (2008, 2013) in his analysis of the logics and practices of humanitarian triage, is a god-like power to make decisions over life and death.

Sacrifice and victimhood are key themes that percolate throughout the chapters in this volume, where they emerge as highly contested domains of valuation and loss. Such concepts resonate in Sam Han's discussion of precarity and loneliness in South Korea where 'development citizens' are demanded to become self-reliant and resilient in the face of increasing anxiety and loneliness for the sake of national development. Likewise, debates that Kenneth George addresses around the artistic uses of the Qur'an in Indonesia, the charitable legacies of the Battle of Karbala in contemporary Shi'a practices as analysed by Till Mostowlansky, and Sunila Kale and Christian Novetzke's discussion of Prime Minister Modi's deployment of yoga as a technique for self-discipline and progress in contemporary India all speak to the place of sacrifice within development.

Both Edoardo Siani and Eli Elinoff discuss the 'sacrifice' of the Thai monarch for his people's development and, vice versa, the sacrifice of the Thai people for their nation. The substance of blood becomes especially potent in Elinoff's discussion of sacrifice in blood demonstrations by 'Red Shirt' protesters in Thailand. For Elinoff, blood is infused with an excess of meaning within Thai society. Blood is a 'powerful substance' oozing with potency and danger. It is polluting and its use subverts social mores and transgresses medicalised notions of hygiene. But in so doing, these protests highlighted the 'irreducible violence' at the heart of the Thai political order; including in its pursuit of dreams of development. As a sacrifice, the giving of blood also indicates the passion and commitment of the protesters and it conveys the self-giving as necessary for the re-congealing of a unified Thai people. In these blood protests the sacrifices of development are cast in a new and illuminating light.

Siani's take on sacrifice unveils the ambiguous political-theological relationships between Buddhist eschatology, Thai royalism, popular sovereignty, and neoliberal capitalism. Focused on the mourning activities organised after King Bhimibol's death at Golden City, a luxury shopping mall in Bangkok, Siani's ethnography pinpoints the Thai military junta's symbolic manipulation of the deceased King's Buddhist divinity, which is reconfigured as a 'political theology of the People' demanding consumers'/citizen's self-sacrifice and submission to the market and the 'enlightened' leaders ruling the country. Once a Buddhist leader who promoted sufficiency and moderation, the deceased monarch is here transformed into a 'god of prosperity' for the purpose of particular political-theological rearrangements between state governance, royal Buddhism, and development.

The transmutation of the Thai King into a deity of future wealth can be seen as one instance of the temporal momentum of development. Development is a compulsively future-oriented ideology – propelled forward toward a promised land that is Newer, Bigger, and Better. As argued by Monique Nuijten (2003), reworking James Fergusson's classic metaphor, development is a 'hope-generating machine' which ignites collective aspirations. Modern development imagines the promise of a better future that can be delivered on demand and within budget. The teleology of modern development, both in its socialist and capitalist iterations, has deep resonances with Judeo-Christian eschatology. Though, of course, in Asia developmentalist aspirations are resourced by a range of other ideologies and theologies, and the ways these combine and/or contrast with Christian genealogies is a pivotal topic for conversation.

The question of genealogy is central to Till Mostowlansky's chapter on Twelver Shiʿa humanitarianism. In contrast to the 'nebulous' role that Christianity plays in Fassin's genealogy of Western humanitarian reason, and arguing against Fassin's 'genealogical and spatial linearity', Mostowlansky argues for an approach that treats the details of specific histories of humanitarianism with attentiveness and care, rather than as foregone conclusions or mere cosmetics. His exemplary study of Shiʿa humanitarian and development networks shows what such an exploration may accomplish. Kabir, one of Mostowlansky's key informants, is a Twelver Shiʿa Muslim and managing trustee of one of the Pakistan's numerous aid organisations. He organises financial transactions according to both Shiʿa tradition and neoliberal discourses of meritocracy. Rather than drawing linearly on genealogies of political-theological significance, 'Kabir bundled the genealogical strings of Shiʿa tradition and giving, global humanitarianism and managerial discourse, thereby weaving together their contents beyond chronological recognition'.

Just as technocrats play the role of priests, so too are religious specialists like Kabir becoming entrepreneurs, accountants, and advocates for capitalist accumulation. Witness the rise of prosperity theology within Christianity, influencing the likes of Joseph Prince's slick New Creation church in Singapore (itself both a mall and Church auditorium combined into a singular and striking amalgam), along with a diverse array of other denominations and movements (Wiegele, 2005). The blurring of conventional religious/secular categorisations appears to be an increasingly common phenomena across Asia in the proliferation of various types of hybridised public figures – such as the Indian consultant sporting a sandalwood paste *tilak* on his forehead who founded an NGO promoting new practices of financial accountability expressed in terms of Dharma and yoga profiled in Erica Bornstein's (2012) ethnography of philanthropy and religious giving in India (Bolotta et al., 2019).

As this last example makes clear, new aspirations for prosperity extend well beyond Christianity (Kitiarsa, 2008). Rachelle Scott's (2009) account of the Dhammakaya Temple in Bangkok highlights the infusion of a prosperity doctrine within the heart of an upwardly mobile, middle-class Thai Buddhism. Daromir Rudnyckyj (2010) and James Hosterey (2015) have both investigated how innovative religious entrepreneurs in Indonesia are reconfiguring Islam into a prosperity-aspiring, market-serving, and revenue-producing capitalist religion. Priests of development can wear suits or robes, can thump Scriptures or tap calculators, and can simultaneously seek to serve both the market and God.

Visions of development differ, as do the mechanisms deployed for attaining the future; but each proffers a 'promise of salvation' (cf. Riesebrodt, 2010). Walt Rostow's seminal *Stages of Economic Growth*, which proposed a stadial process for capitalist ('non-Communist') accumulation that culminates in the eschatological 'age of mass consumption', has been a highly influential example of such a religious imagination transposed onto utopian visions of worldly prosperity. Remarkably, countries like South Korea and Singapore have attained these ends. Their economic success is materially manifested and performed in any major mall in Seoul or along Singapore's Orchard Road. And yet the 'East Asian Miracle', as exemplified by these two countries in particular, has been presented as a model of a different kind of modernisation, built on 'Asian Values' and Confucian ethics. At the same time, evangelical Christians in both these countries have pronounced their nations to be new Asian 'Antiochs' – beachheads for campaigns of Christianisation into neighbouring Asian states aspiring to developmentalist dreams of similar trajectories of economic growth.

Political theologies and development in Asia

Several scholars such as Charles Keyes (1978: 160–1) and Stanley Tambiah (1984: 344) have argued that the advent of Western modernisation and development has produced crises of authority and political instability as a result of new conceptual disjunctions between state sovereignty and religious cosmologies. Ian Harris (2013), however, has characterised Asian Buddhism as a 'total culture' that continues to provide both religious and secular actors with moral values and specific worldviews to engage with the political processes. In many Asian states today, religious authority and political power are complexly entangled – even in cases where constitutional provisions establish formally secular state structures (Feener, 2014).

We would argue that the historically heterogeneous system of discourses and practices that are today identified as 'development' have led both to increasing affinities and tensions between conflicting political theologies, and promoted the creative emergence of hybrid, if contested, theological-political formations. Barton Scott (2016: 7–8), for example, taking Gandhi as political theorist, sheds light on the conjuncture of Protestant and Hindu notions of asceticism, self-rule, and sovereignty, suggesting that the 'Protestant ethic discovered an affinity for various practices of the self, associated with Hindu tradition' while circulating along the cultural crosscurrents of empire. The politics of Gandhi and the circulations of Western ethics are taken up in this volume in Kale and Novetzke's analysis of 'the yogic ethic and the spirit of development'.

Within Southeast Asia, the example of contemporary Thailand is also quite instructive. The fall of the absolute monarchy in 1932 resulted in its temporary disappearance from the public scene. This political vacuum created space for the rise of a series of military juntas to govern the country. These regimes engaged in an ethno-nationalistic project grounded, ironically, on kingship metaphysics, with the latter being conceived as an essential 'theological source' of political legitimacy (Bolotta, forthcoming). Modern notions such as democracy and development have been symbolically inflected through Hindu-Buddhist cosmologies to produce what has been described as 'Thai-style democracy' (Hewinson, 1997: 266). In the modern refashioning of the monarchy's theological-political role, secular notions and practices of development are central. Indeed, King Bhumibol's moral perfection and divine stature were reflected in, and bolstered by, his engagement in development projects.[7] As both Siani and Elinoff note in their chapters in this volume, the Thai monarch has been described as the 'king of development, modernity, progress and democracy' (Ivarsson and Isager, 2010: 2), and after the 1997 financial crisis, his

controversial 'sufficiency economy' (*setachid pho phieng*) – an economic philosophy which combines a Buddhist ethics of moderation, ideals of rural collectivism, and anti-materialism – was proposed as an antidote to the individualistic model of global neo-liberal capitalism. The king's sufficiency economy, also praised by the UN, was then inserted in the military designed 2007 constitution as an 'authentically' Thai mode of production.

It is important to bear in mind that, as Andrew Johnson (2013) has argued, 'contra a Weberian idea of disenchanting modernity, national development and the rise of image-making technology has increased the magical-divine aura of the [Thai] monarch'. Neo-liberal capitalist trends, social media, new technologies, and television have actually provided digital support and an unprecedented aesthetic poignancy to the supernatural (Morris, 2000; Jackson, 2010). The sacred aura of King Bhumibol was amplified, rather than demystified, by his active appropriation of modernity and development. This can also be observed in the theological-political relevance of images (as opposed to just verbal communication) and the visual dimensions of power in Buddhist polities. Indeed, as Christine Gray (1995, 234) has observed, the religious value attributed to silence in Theravada societies, makes 'the manipulation of sacred images' assume 'a disproportionate load of communicative functions associated with language in western societies'.

The priority of aesthetics noted here is also a turn to materiality. While material things have been analysed both in terms of development/humanitarianism and religion, rarely are these two domains brought into substantive conversation.[8] In this volume material artefacts figure prominently within the analysis of Asian theo-politics. Indeed, far from peripheral, the materialisation of the theo-political emerges as a crucial space for critical analysis. Eli Elinoff examines the religious materiality of blood and concrete. These contrasting substances played very different roles within protest movements in Thailand, and Elinoff works with this materiality in forming his political-theological argument about modern Thai politics. Kenneth George's contribution examines the materiality of Qur'anic objects. His chapter focuses on two particular objects: a complexly illuminated manuscript of the Qur'an which went on display in 1995 in Jakarta, Indonesia, and a bustier embroidered with Islamic texts designed by Karl Lagerfeld and worn by Claudia Schiffer on a catwalk in Paris in 1994. Through attention to the ways these objects were articulated, imagined, and contested, George casts new light on Muslim theo-politics in Southeast Asia. While these objects are entangled within the theological imaginations of lived Islam in Indonesia, they are also embedded within the political manoeuvring of the final years of President Suharto's development-oriented New Order state. George's 'object-oriented political

theology' facilitates a critical analysis of the contested and dynamic religious materiality of the Indonesian public sphere.

Numerous commentators have pointed to the complex intersections of religion, politics, and neo-liberal capitalism in relation to the sacralisation of monetary prosperity and the on-going commodification of social life (Goodchild, 2009; Collier, 2012; Ong, 2006). In her analysis of Islamic charity in Egypt, for example, Mona Atia (2013) discusses 'pious neoliberalism', while Jean and John Comaroff (1999) document the rise of 'occult economies' in post-colonial rural South Africa, where the growing deployment of magical means for material ends underlines the contradictory effects of the encounters between popular religion and neo-liberalism. Hybrid and variegated political theologies continue to emerge, circulate, and redefine themselves as a result of these non-linear intersections, both in the West, and beyond.

In their chapters included in this volume, both Till Mostowlansky and Armando Salvatore provide sophisticated investigations into the non-liner intersections of globally circulating political theologies. Mostowlansky examines the complex entanglements that weave together long histories of Shi'a charity with the professionalised techno-political managerialism of contemporary humanitarianism in ways that eschew simplistic visions of the unfurling of history. Salvatore's insightful analysis of the Islamicate of Western, Central, and South Asia seeks to move beyond Eurocentric 'Westphalian benchmarks' for a fresh analysis of the 'religiopolitical nexus'.

While politics are intrinsically theological, development aspires to transcendence, and in so doing it mimics, encapsulates, and reconfigures the discourses and practices of religion as experienced and understood in diverse ways all across Asia. The framework of political theology thus provides rich possibilities for renewing and furthering the analysis of 'development', 'modernity' and governance in Asia. At the same time, the turn to exploring political theology in Asian contexts pluralises our theoretical horizon in ways that destabilise historical linearity and normative interpretations of the religiopolitical nexus. Critical approaches to development that interrogate operative notions of transcendence, sacrifice and victimhood, and aspiration and salvation offer rich possibilities for understanding crucial dynamics of contemporary political life across diverse societies. In advancing such new frameworks, this volume demonstrates the enormous heuristic potential afforded by de-centred, post-colonial approaches of political theology for thinking about development well beyond the West in multiple and complex global entanglements.

2

East of Westphalia: shaping the body-politic via institutional charisma

Armando Salvatore

In her book *Advice for the Sultan: Prophetic Voices and Secular Politics in Medieval Islam*, Neguin Yavari (2014: 1–2) writes:

> The search for the origins of modern political thought is … a celebration of the felicitous birth of the modern world that was European … Regardless of the nature of the initial impetus, whether it was the state that was empowered, leading to the emergence of the individuals engaged in political action, or the impersonal state that directly made the modern political possible … by the eighteenth century Europe had taken leave of the rest of the world. She then took a Whiggish look at herself, liked what she saw, and the modern was born.

Yavari's contribution should be considered integral to a combined endeavour within intellectual and political history which complexifies the study of socio-political modernity in an effort to overcome facile Whiggish (more than generically Western) certainties in the study of the religiopolitical nexus. My own contribution intends to complement this wave of studies (which I will selectively reference in this chapter) by employing methodologies of historical sociology, supplemented by a critique and reconstruction of categories of Western social theory. One of the primary fields of historical sociology concerns how the modern state has emerged and taken form since the Late Middle Ages. This chapter approaches the concept of 'political theology' through the analysis of the influence of religious knowledge and symbols on state-formation. My approach does not consist in applying general theory, whether Whiggish or less so, to Asian Islamicate cases. I am rather going the opposite path. Even if tentatively referring to general theory concepts as an initial background, I will rework, unsettle, and finally reconstruct these concepts,

via the analysis of historical trajectories from the Islamic ecumene. I will explore the extent to which a decentred view of the religiopolitical nexus seen from the 'East of Westphalia' can alter the terms of comparison between the European, Leviathan-centered model of sacral sanctioning of sovereignty and comparable, though different, Asian patterns.

With regard to Asia, the chapter adopts the methodology of the historical sociology of Islam for investigating what is specific to the religiopolitical nexus within modern Islamicate empires, while it revises the vocabulary of social and political theory for gaining a new, less Eurocentric, more Asia-oriented understanding of 'political theology'. Through this shift non-Western state formations, which were modern in their own right before being exposed to Western narratives of progress and development, are investigated with regard to the specific political theologies articulated within ruling circles, rather than being measured in terms of an ever deferred catching up with Western (or, indeed, Whiggish) models.

That religious knowledge and charismatic attributes and symbols have been constitutive of power and its legitimacy is almost a tautology for social and political theory. Historical sociology, whether comparative or less so, is a prime tool allowing us to question, enrich, and complexify this type of theory. Theory itself can become sharper and more useful if subjected to a process of self-clarification that spells out its ontological (or, as in this case, theological) presuppositions and make them better controllable. This is a better option than taking these presuppositions for granted and/or concealing them within the folds of historical or social-scientific analysis – as it sometimes happened, as I will try to show, with Max Weber. This is even more necessary since these presuppositions can directly impinge on the definition itself of the object of enquiry, namely 'political theology', intended as a quite specific understanding of how religion impacts politics.

The religiopolitical nexus is namely so co-essential to the constitution of human societal cohesion and political authority – and therefore of society and politics themselves – that at the moment itself we envision (and sometimes theorise) society, the nexus is already present, visible or invisible, in its constitutive code. This is true at least to the extent we do not operate on the basis of an ontology that polices out of its premises all factors that cannot be reduced to sheer material interests. In this sense, we should beware of understanding 'political theology' as just a sophisticated conceptual term to define the religiopolitical nexus, or the civilisational power of religion. Political theology is historically a quite specific construction, theoretical and practical at the same time, which needs to be understood and delimited with an appropriate combination

of ontological awareness, social theory reflection, and historical comparative evidence.

Luca Mavelli (2013: 111–12) reminds us that Max Weber was convinced of the existence of a close nexus between the rationalisation of domination (in the shape of the modern, bureaucratic state) and the economy (in the guise of capitalism), on the one hand, and the development of systematic theology within Occidental Christianity, on the other. On the other hand, Weber was also opening the way to a comparative historical sociology of how different religious and civilisational traditions operate different forms of rationalisation. The study of the religiopolitical nexus within historic Islamicate formations (and contemporary Muslim-majority societies) is still largely an open construction site. This investigation has the potential to become a reflecting mirror of unexamined Western assumptions about this putative strong nexus between religious, political and economic rationalisation which determine criteria of scholarly and political normality in the definition and classification of modern, democratic, secular polities. Often framed as a 'sociology of Islam' (Turner, 1974; Stauth, 1993; Salvatore, 2016), the approach reflects a specific perspective, which is given by the continual repositioning of Islamic and Islamicate traditions of thought and practice within wider civilisational processes and within modernity itself (Arnason et al., 2006).

Through this sociology of Islam approach, fundamental notions of social and political theory, and the idea itself of a 'political theology', appear as if displaced and de-centred, and thus more malleable and amenable to reasoned revisions, rather than rigid comparisons. Political theology as a marker of a certain type of rationalisation is thus no longer ancillary to an immanent scrutiny of the patterns of colonial modernity determined by Western hegemony. At the same time, Islam's putative 'difference' appears no longer as the outcome of a bundle of cultural limitations and institutional deficits, but as coinciding with the 'normality' of its hemisphere-wide rationalisation dynamism, providing a potential key nexus across the artificial distinction between 'Europe' and 'Asia'[1] Europe as the former periphery of the hemisphere turned into a global centre would then represent an extreme, not a normal power trajectory.

Contractual confraternisation vs corporate sacralisation

In its historic European trajectory, theologico-political rationalisation should be primarily located within the historico-political constitution of sovereign powers within early modernity, which overlapped with the earliest colonial enterprises and their increasing use of overpowering

forms of violence and coercion against non-European populations. Yet political theology also possesses deeper and more intricate roots going back to the Middle Ages if not earlier, particularly if one follows the line of inquiry associated with the work of Carl Schmitt (1982), his exegetes, and also many among his critics (Taubes, 1987; Agamben, 1995).

A more contemporary development of this line of investigation into the political theology of the European state is given by the work of the German constitutional theorist Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde (2017; see also Vinx, 2018), who argued that the European state, being more than its constituting parts, possesses an ontological foundation only partly reflected in constitutional law. As a consequence, even its secular outlook needs a theologico-political justification of sorts, consisting ultimately in, as it were, 'making one', the state, 'out of many', the citizens (once subjects). It does so, therefore, even when (or even more when) secularity, while embracing and institutionalising pluralism, still reflects a high degree of cultural homogeneity, intended as a shared way of life/living together which, based on this theory, can only be legitimised by popular sovereignty, the rule by the *demos* (the 'people'). This *demos* is understood as 'a shared community … bound together by solidarity and reciprocity' (Künkler and Stein, 2017: 13), which in turn can only be safeguarded by building and maintaining suitable institutions. The most visible Schmittian heritage in this argument lies precisely in the fact that the shape of such institutions ensures that the state can have a 'last word' over potential antagonisms threatening the integrity of the the social body. One can detect here an ineliminable Schmittian residue (if not, yet, kernel) of political theology nested at the core of the constitutional order of even a secular democracy (Künkler and Stein, 2017: 17).

This thread of reasoning leads us squarely into the mouth of the issue: the amount and type of sacralisation that is needed in making an institution as an organism representing a collective body and not just the sum of individual wills. And here the trajectory of Islamicate societies and states works as a powerful reflecting mirror of Western, including Weberian assumptions of what is an institution. This is the approach that will be followed in this chapter. It elaborates upon, but also unpacks, Weber's intuition according to which the critical threshold marking the building of full-fledged institutions in the European modern trajectory is the passage from a 'confraternisation' in a group that originates, but also transcends, sheer ties of kin (*Verbrüderung*) to the consecration of the collective bond in the form of an institution (*Anstalt*; Weber, 1980 [1921–22]: 425–37). A brotherhood represents accordingly not an archaic twist of a clan-based aggregation but an initially dynamic associational bond, a flexible mode of instituting social connectedness: 'a community based

on artificially created and freely willed mutual ties, not on consanguinity' (Nippel, 2002: 132).

It is noteworthy that for Weber the confraternal bond decisively impacted the social landscape of all Western Eurasia, therefore including not only Europe but also the trajectory of the Islamicate civilisation as it originated in what at his time was mostly designated as 'West Asia' – and that later in the century became the 'Near and Middle East', as opposed to what also Weber saw as the 'Eastern' (if not outright Oriental) Eurasia represented by India and China. This is because, in Weber's view, the caste system in India and the ancestor cult in China acted as powerful brakes on the process of molding brotherhoods substantially emancipated from real, not just imagined blood ties (Nippel, 2002: 132).

Yet, as we know, Weber's theory is better known for its explanation of the exceptionalism of the West as 'Occident'. This exception severed Europe's earlier sharing in key developments with the Islamicate realm (starting with the confraternisation matrix) and made it both unique and universally normative. Late-medieval developments within the burgeoning life of European cities were accordingly characterised by the formation of the idea of a stable 'institution' out of more fluid confraternal bonds. Here the sacralisation of the bond consists precisely in making 'one', i.e. a unitary juridical personality, out of 'many', namely a scattered multiplicity of associates or members, the outcome of which is what we call a corporate personality.

What Weber had in mind were the lay confraternities that took form in Europe's late-medieval cities and the way they became the main source of the institutionalised notion of municipal authority taking the form of corporate powers representing and governing the city. The argument was crucial to Weber's elucidation of the European city as the cradle itself of the exceptional character of modern European political institutions, a view prone to produce orientalist fallouts with the emergence of the contrasting category of the 'Islamic city' (Abu-Lughod, 1987; Zubaida, 2006). The Weberian emphasis that is most apparent here is laid on the ritualised dimension of consecrating the collective personality, which at a minimum required an oath, as reflected in his notion of a 'sworn confraternisation' (*schwurgemeinschaftliche Verbrüderung*; Weber, 1980 [1921–22]: 748).

What matters here is that the oath is the ritual that allows for the incorporation of the fraternal bond into a collective body, a corporation. The ritual consecrates an institution precisely to the extent it quite literally helps transcending the network of connections among a group of 'brothers', which otherwise consists in a mere series of overlapping dyads. The corporation is precisely what transcends and transforms this

underlying web into a higher, collective identity or personality. The phenomenon embraced a variety of groups starting from local municipal associations (like trade guilds) and the royal courts of the emerging states — passing through the business companies which we still mainly refer to as 'corporations' and which seem to have monopolised this designation within civil codes, in spite of the fact that the idea has a mainly religiopolitical, rather than an economic genealogy (Weber, 1980 [1921–22]: 425–46). The bottom line is that in the Weberian argument the institutionalisation, even if (or perhaps precisely since) requiring sacralisation, is a form of rationalisation that establishes the accountability of the collective subject in the form of a unified, corporate person. Institutionalisation stabilises the rational character of the underlying (if elementary and implicit) theology of making the one out of many.

Now the point, well captured by Weber (though less so by his interpreters), is that such a corporate personality is only one, and quite peculiar, outcome of many possible transformations of the initial associative, fundamentally contractual matrix represented by the process of 'becoming brothers'. Indeed in the Islamicate case the confraternity model keeps itself in most cases at a safe distance from undergoing a sacralisation of the bond into a corporate personality, preferring to rely (as it certainly happened with the rise of organised Sufism at the beginning of the second millennium CE) on patterns of 'spiritual seniority'. These were enabled by reverence toward the older 'brothers' and to the shaykh/*pir* as a spiritual 'father' (Babak and Salvatore, 2018; Salvatore, 2018a) – even when an oath of allegiance to the latter became a key ritual. No formal incorporation of the associative bond into a unitary juridical personality occurred. In contrast, within Islamicate contexts the confraternity preserves a truly 'lay' (here intended as unconsecrated, non-sacralised) orientation, with the result of keeping the institutional dimension open to reinterpretations and recombinations.

The Islamic 'oath' of allegiance, *bayʿa*, also operating within a variety of brotherhoods (Sufi, guilds, and hybrids thereof) is taken from the vocabulary of sale transactions, to the point that 'oath' appears as a markedly Eurocentric mistranslation. It basically, literally means that one is 'buying into' somebody else's authority. The fact that a *bayʿa* within a brotherhood is to some degree 'ritualised' does not disprove its strongly lay character. However, in order not to become prey to a facile binary (lay vs sacral) that only makes sense this side of a modern Western differentiation, one should note that sale transactions are themselves ritualised in that context. This is also because the modus operandi of a trader is often modelled on the chivalric and even spiritual ethos of the brotherhoods. It is the European late-medieval sanctioning of a split between the mystical

union in the corporate body and the pursuit of commercial interest (even when these goals are pursued within the same corporate organisation) that injects a resistant binary into our inherited, inevitably Eurocentric vocabulary.

The non-sacralised dimension of the brotherhood bond within Islamicate contexts facilitated the proliferation of local sub-branches or the merging of different brotherhoods over long distances. Yet rather than recognising the virtues of this institutional malleability staying ashore of sacralisation, Weber's interpretation tended to take it as a proof that Islam got stuck within a rather ancient model of brotherhood. This was additionally subordinated, according to him, to the prevailing 'warrior's ethos' he saw as the main engine of Islam's expansion. He largely missed the institutional flexibility of the brotherhood pattern as a formidable, if not the principal engine of this expansion (Hodgson, 1993: 149–58; Salvatore, 2016: 271–87).

Obviously if there is such an 'Islamic path' of institutional flexibility-*cum*-effectiveness, it is never devoid of a type of authority that, as Weber saw, is ultimately dependent on obedience, as it relies on combinations of material and symbolic violence. It is rather a Whiggish appropriation (and simplification) of Weber's analysis in the form of 'Weberism' (Salvatore, 1997: 107–8) that might lead to see in the corporate personality, no doubt an exclusive property of Occidental developments, the only organisational and ontological formula feeding both into the rationality of modern capitalism and modern bureaucratic steering. Additionally, this Weberist narrative would see this Western monopoly as providing the only possible gate to secularisation, also entailing a denial of any need for an underlying political theology.

From this viewpoint, the Islamic path appears as a traditionalist self-limitation, keeping authority hostage of unaccountable, even inscrutable power manipulations – like those one would see in the wide spectrum of recombinations of patterns mutuality and hierarchy articulated in legal, educational, and fraternal terms. And yet, underlying all such permutations there is an eminently 'contractual' bond, largely but not necessarily following Shari'a precepts on contracts, and relying on a web of mutual understandings among the 'brothers', while also responding to recognised chains of command.

Based on the previous considerations, we should be able to see at least two levels of religious charisma impacting on the sacralisation of the associational bond and turning it into an institutional form of the type that will provide the essential scaffolding to the European Westphalian state. This outcome includes the colonial and post-colonial, non-Western variants of this state form, partly nourished by endogenous traditions, or what some

International Relations scholars have called 'Eastphalia.' The first is the general, 'West-Eurasian' level determined by the confraternal charisma of the brotherhood model and its underlying 'soft' patterns of ritualisation cementing the bond. The second is the specific twist this model underwent in Europe since the Late Middle Ages, which influenced subsequent processes of state formation up to the rise of the Westphalian Leviathan, which will be addressed below.

We should add that even if critically articulating an altered Weberian perspective from a sociology of Islam viewpoint, we cannot take for granted Weber's exclusion of South and even more of East Asia (efficaciously dubbed Indosphere and Sinosphere: Duara, 2015) from the ancient type of non-consanguineous brotherhood. This is not only because these two macro-civilisational areas were affected in various periods by both European Christian and Islamic patterns of managing the threshold between the associational bond and institutional power. It is so also since developments in the Indosphere and Sinosphere might have by themselves provided avenues of confraternisation (e.g., like in the Chinese model of 'secret society', that was probably better emancipated from real consanguinity than assumed by Weber). Even more, we should start to acknowledge that it is actually developments originating in what we call Central Asia (a region usually, and quite surprisingly, excluded from current discussions on Asian modernities) that can explain many permutations of political theology (or of its surrogates and alternatives) West and East of this crucial region.

The body of Western political theology

In this perspective, even Weber's well-known, and notoriously nebulous notion of 'charisma' might take clearer contours and provide a first way of exit from the occidentalist bias embodied in the notion of political theology. We can proceed with the hypothesis that Weber's endeavour to provide a viable concept of charisma was an attempt to make sociologically plausible what was still basically a theological concept. In this way, he could circumvent the risk of having to face squarely questions of political theology whose ontology was outside of the theoretical purview of the social sciences, and rather within the precinct of the power and legitimacy ideologies of church, state, and their relations. The initial input into Weber's notion of charisma originated, indeed, from theological discussions that during his time focused on the meaning of the conferral of grace as a gift, via the institutionalised ministering of sacraments by the church. A basic conceptual overlapping with the just sketched discussion

on the sacralising shift from brotherhood to corporate personality is already visible here.

The way chosen by Weber in order to de-theologise charisma was by pinning down charisma to 'personality types', particularly the military hero and the charismatic magician. Thanks to such borrowings from other fields, ranging from anthropology and mythology, he was turning away, at least for a moment, from the institutional armature of the sacraments. The way the discussion of this concept links up to the one, previously analysed, of institutional consecration (which is just a notch more general than seeing ministering sacraments as a fundamental model of sacralisation) was by arguing, with Weber, that, after all, sacraments can be conceived as a ritualistically and theologically perfected specification belonging to the wider genre of 'magic', in perfect analogy with the (also previously mentioned) making of a corporation. We have to do here with a sacramental, (quasi)magic turning of a multiplicity of subject positions into the organic body of a corporate institution that ultimately mimics the Church as the body of Christ (Salvatore, 2013: 96–97).

This chain of argument, however, did not allow for a persuasive sociologisation of charisma with Weber. The notion retained both an occidentalist and a theologico-political bias. We can see in this process of concept formation a political theology in disguise that singles out the exceptionalism of Western Christendom against the much more gradualist and realist (and in this sense anti-magical) approach to institution-building found in the Islamicate domain: up to the point that we can safely state that the Western, Latin Christian, and fully 'Occidental' field of political theology does not match too well even its most contiguous religio-civilisational area, covered by the Islamic ecumene. Its underlying type of sacramental, organicist 'magic' seems quite analogous to the 'double body of the king' famously elucidated by Kantorowicz (1957). This is the outcome of the same type of process that produced the metaphor of the 'body-politic' which we still use today – mostly without questioning the theologico-political and even theologico-juridical ontology authorising it, as done by the late-medieval English court lawyers who instituted the concept on the basis of ideas inherited from Roman law.

The Weberian sociological counterpart to this political theology of the double body is enshrined in the distinction between office and person. It should be noted, however, that while Weber does distinguish in principle between 'private' corporation and 'public' institution, he is also sanguine in showing that one cannot read back this outcome to their much more fluid, mutually entangled development (Weber, 1980 [1921–22]: 425–40). This is also apparent in the just mentioned construct of the body-politic, particularly in the way it was matched by how the European

Westphalian state took the iconic form of a densely corporate Leviathan. This corporate, i.e., body-like form (Lat. *corpus*= body) was depicted on the book cover which Thomas Hobbes, the author of *Leviathan*, carefully commissioned to a French professional engraver and frontispiece-maker (Bredekamp, 2007: 44–7). One step further, unearthing the full theology lurking behind such concepts of collective bodies/corporate personalities requires envisioning a process of 'excarnation' of the inner truth that inverted the Christian myth of incarnation and the salvific message of the church into the sovereign prerogatives of the modern state (Salvatore, 2013: 96). The language and the iconography of Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*, almost exactly contemporary to the Westphalian outcome, provide stability to the collective body via the mutual incorporation of the sovereign and his subjects (see Esposito 2002: 83). Modern states appear as rather 'heterodox' formations imitating, yet inverting, the 'orthodox' pattern of the Roman church. They do so by adopting the corporative model of the body of Christ and strengthening it through tightening the mutual incorporation between the subject and the sovereign. The turning of the juridical/political theology of the body-politic into the political myth of the Leviathan culminated in the seventeenth century, with the emergence of the Westphalian order centred on state sovereignty. This order became the primary source of legitimisation of the confessional proto-nationalism that was institutionalised through the formula of the *cuius regio eius religio* ('Whose realm, his religion') first proclaimed by the Peace of Augsburg in 1555 and ultimately sanctioned by the Peace of Westphalia of 1648, through which the sovereign determines the religion of his subjects. That the modern Westphalian state is also, by default, a confessional state, given that the primary glue of the body-politic is confessional homogeneity, was confirmed by the wide appropriation of the biblical myth of the 'chosen people' to the emerging 'national' majorities (Gorsky, 2003).

Beyond Leviathan? Religiopolitical formations in Islamicate Asian contexts

Whatever the subsequent shifts, to be shared by both the confessional and the secular models of modern Westphalian states is the theologico-political imbrication of the matrix itself of their statehood, namely the 'institution'. Analyses of the place of Islam in the constitutions of post-colonial Muslim-majority states usually do not pay sufficient attention to the cultural and religious variability of the threshold required to legally consecrate an institution and the underlying dialectic between charisma and consensus. In his theory of the law, the state and institutions, which

he dealt with in his *Economy and Society*, Weber was not quite able to capture the comparative importance of this threshold. Ignored is the possibility that the threshold could also be set at a high level, like it often happened within the Islamicate realm. This was due to the coexistence of a quite ambitious ideal of charismatic rule via the caliphate or imamate, presupposing a high concentration of religiopolitical charisma, and the often-preferred practice to articulate social power informally, outside of a legally secured and charismatically consecrated institutional framework. The consequence was to allow for power-sharing arrangements rendering absolutist state sovereignty unpractical if not outright illegitimate.

This comparative observation on the variability of the threshold of institutional consecration highlights how precious the 'Islamic difference' can be in a comparative perspective. Islamicate history did produce major instances of powerful centralising states supported by specific forms of religious charisma, in parallel to how Westphalian legal formulas consecrated a new state system in Europe's core. Yet the Islamicate trajectory unfolded without suffusing the resulting statehood with the incorporated charisma of symbolically and institutionally organic entities like the rising European Leviathans, who could not compromise on absolute sovereignty on the territories and populations within their borders.

Like the rest of Asia, the Islamicate realm did produce religious conceptualisations of charismatic state power in parallel, and partly in competition, to such developments and prior to the colonial extension of the Westphalian system outside the European metropoles. However, the starting point for the analysis of such Islamicate precolonial, yet modern expressions of the religiopolitical nexus should be the articulation of charisma at the social, not political level, within West-Asian patterns of confraternisation conceived as variants within the same 'ancient' type. How the nexus developed within this associational and contractual model will be the first testing ground of whether and how the Latin Christian (and therefore 'Western') idea of political theology might make sense within Islamicate and Asian horizons, and at which conditions. This step will also help understanding what the 'Islamic difference' might contribute to clarify concerning not just its own articulation of the theologico-political theme, but also the peculiarities, the universalist deficit (and, potentially, the insufficient long-term sustainability) of the Western Westphalian prototype itself.

Early modern Islamicate sovereignty was often nourished by millennial charisma (Moin, 2012), while it achieved considerable results in terms of the accumulation of fairly centralised forms of political power, even if based on non-organicist views of the collective body. This type of sovereignty also based power on specific patterns of differentiation between the

state and religion. The Timurid Empire (1370–1507) could be considered a proto-modern Islamicate instance of such power, providing a basic model to several other states which thrived into early and colonial modernity, in particular the anti-Timurid Ottomans (1281–1924) and the Timurid Mughals (1526–1858). This occurred largely thanks to a targeted work of Timurid court scholars to make charisma stable and well ingrained into the emerging attributes of sovereignty.

Yet these empires, while fairly centralised, were not based on a model of organically centralised power like the one that was propelled up by early modern developments in Europe, enshrined in the Westphalian arrangements of state sovereignty and responding to the iconography of Leviathan's organic body-politic. As stressed by Ali Yaycioglu (2018: 436), the early modern Muslim empires consisted of partnerships between ruling dynasties intent on making their bureaucratic cadres and elite armies autonomous from particularistic social interests, urban notables including *'ulama'*, the leaders of the nomadic sector, and most notably selected Sufi brotherhoods along with their powerful masters. I will delineate some key trajectories through which saintly charisma was appropriated by various rulers for the sake of the type of political legitimacy required by the governance of such assemblages. The analysis will show the emergence of original articulations of a modern Islamicate religiopolitical nexus that can be contrasted with the European Leviathan-model of sacral sanctioning of sovereignty.

During the period preceding the demise of the effective power of the 'Abbasid Caliphate, both Sufi brotherhoods and 'Alid groups started to lay claim to the crucial category of *walaya*, the sacral power exclusive to the imams and the saints or 'friends' of God (*awliya*'). The concept expressed closeness to the Creator and to the House of the Prophet, as well as the temporal rulership entailed by this spiritual relationship (sometimes identified through a slight semantic shift into the category of *wilaya*). In the process, 'the Helleno-Irano-Semitic ideal of the saint-philosopher-king' moved away from the realm of centralised authority (embodied by the caliph and the sultans) into the more magmatic domain of unstable military rule matching socio-cultural self-organisation (Melvin-Koushki, 2018: 354). The era of the Mongol conquests from the early thirteenth century onward created the conditions for an appropriation of the charisma of the saints by the political centres and the formation of new types of sovereignty whereby rulers could posture as millennial saint-philosopher-kings.

This concept of saintly charisma became, as in the words of Melvin-Koushki (2018: 354), a 'quicksilver category' eagerly appropriated and redesigned, across the Sunni-Shi'i rift, by a variety of court scholars on

behalf of their sovereign masters. Through the new wave of conquests and under the rule of Amir Timur (Tamerlane; 1336–1405), this charismatic model was subjected to an initial refurbishing and upgrading. His royal persona could be given form by Timurid scholars, after his passing, as a receptacle of *walaya*, thus radically transcending the type of ruling legitimacy normally accruing to patrimonially-structured nomadic empires. Accordingly, the former sheep raider Timur became the heir of both 'Ali and Alanqo'a, the Mongol's mythical princess-mother (Moin, 2012: 37–38; Melvin-Koushki, 2018: 356–8). This type of political theology influenced contemporary and subsequent empires, including the Ottomans that Timur defeated at the Battle of Ankara in 1402, toward the end of his reign (Salvatore, 2018b: 276–7).

In the Timurid (even more under its later Indian 'Mughal' branch) and Ottoman cases the saint-philosopher-kings benefited both from the long revived ancient Persian ideas of absolute monarchy and from the more recent Mongol articulations of universal empire via their dynastic law (the *yasaq*). Empire increasingly became a matter of justifying universal sovereignty in terms that could facilitate modern political centralisation and bureaucratisation. The matching political theologies should be carefully assessed. From Timur onward, and climaxing into the Islamic millennium (1592), the greatest rulers of the sixteenth century styled themselves as millennial sovereigns, 'their holy bodies marrying heaven and earth, their sacral, transcendent, prophetic natures bringing final meaning to human history or inaugurating a dispensation wholly new' (Melvin-Koushki, 2018: 355). Such political theologies writ Islamic were characterised by a level of symbolic complexity, but also cosmological opening, that contrasts with the dry simplicity (and maybe crudeness) of the iconic, organicist, and self-entrenched character of European sacralisation models, which culminated into the double body of the king and the Leviathan as an artificial corporative mega-body.

The radically innovative claims to millennial sovereignty by the Indo-Timurid (Mughal) Emperor Akbar (r. 1556–1605) were not surprisingly still largely indebted to earlier Timurid ideas of saintly ruling charisma. He had the merit to provide religious and cultural cohesion to Mughal India by working relentlessly, and certainly creatively, on reconstructing a type of charisma based on an uncompromisingly universalist religiopolitical blueprint which he and his key courtiers called *sulh-i kull*, nothing short of 'universal harmony'. This claim rested on appropriating the same genealogy of saintliness at work for Timur and going back to Alanqo'a, also including its crucial match of Mary, mother of Jesus, based on the common idea of immaculate conception (Moin, 2012: 137). Overall, the outcome was a radically trans-confessional political theology.

To this claim Akbar added, as the Islamic millennium fast approached, the idea of a *din-i ilahi*, a 'divine religion' further upgrading, as it were, his holiness into divine status. This was supported by a top-down type of syncretic reinterpretation of Sufism that was implemented by founding a *sui generis* brotherhood (yet one quite faithfully modelled on the *tariqa* pattern) that he folded into his court's ranks. Akbar could posture as more than just the master of the brotherhood: as a quasi-divine, living saint. The enterprise corroborated his saintliness even more explicitly than any of his predecessors could do by drawing on the philosopher-kingship of the *falsafa* tradition (Hodgson, 1974: 73–80; Salvatore, 2016: 192–3). By constructing his physical body as reflecting the wedding of the archetypal forces of heaven and earth, he implemented a radically monistic inversion of the English doctrine of the double body of the monarch and subverted the Weberian distinction between office and person as providing the sole benchmark of political modernity.

Yet in spite of what one might infer from missing this key Weberian modern distinction, the outcome of Akbar's ruling charisma did not depend on a merely personalised kind of patrimonial rule. It configured a 'cosmocratic' model whereby earthly sovereignty reflects a celestial one (Melvin-Koushki, 2018: 367). Its iconic crystallisation was not an omnipotent organic body, a Leviathan, but a concentric expansion, on a cosmic scale, of the matrix of a brotherhood. A differentiation of the brotherhood model via concentric circles of meaning and function contrasts with the sharply binary differentiation between person and office and with the double body of the king.

The process of modern state-formation within the Islamicate realm is in the Ottoman case even more strongly related to the crystallisation of autonomous, though articulate, circles and networks like those linking Sufi brotherhoods to tribal confederations and warriors' coalitions. The Ottoman dynasty emerged at the head of such flexible yet highly functional assemblages and should be considered one of the most original (and spectacularly longest enduring) outcomes of the basically anarchical developments of what Marshall Hodgson called the Middle Periods (10th to 15th century). Rising in the thirteenth century, the Ottoman Empire proved able to create a balance, over several centuries, between hierarchical rule and chains of command on the one hand, and a rather horizontal type of socio-cultural connectedness on the other. The capacity to provide cohesions to a variety of individuals and groups was fuelled by the crucial role played by increasingly organised, yet enduringly malleable brotherhoods – often but not necessarily belonging to the field of what scholars, perhaps imperfectly, insist in calling Sufism (Salvatore, 2018a).

This assortment of circles and networks provided the essential background to another extremely sophisticated climax of early modern sovereign consecration, which is visible in the case of the Ottoman Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent (r. 1520–1566). His charisma solidified at the same time as Lawgiver (*qanuni*), as the Supreme Pole (a title of exquisitely Sufi origin), and as the millenarian *akhir al-zaman*, namely the Last World Emperor. The way of Suleyman's charismatic elevation, which proceeded through rerouting the full force of his millenarian kingship into his status as a Lawgiver, was not smooth. It required decades of creative and often daring experiments by his court scholars. The process of distilling convenient forms of saintly charisma suiting the ruler was also favoured by the co-optation of higher *'ulama'* and masters of selected Sufi orders into the institutional core of the state and its court. The process culminated into a new, highly consistent Ottoman culture of imperial rule where the high bureaucracy played an increasingly active and reflexive role, even approximating Weberian standards of rational bureaucratic steering (Melvin-Koushki, 2018; Moin, 2018).

In this Ottoman trajectory of socio-political modernity sovereign charisma does not invest the body-politic like in the icon of the Leviathan but suffuses the socio-political, institutional, and circulatory nexus enshrined in the image of the 'circle of justice'. This image often consisted of a circle with eight spikes, each of which explains how a certain entity or group (like the state, or the army, or the subjects, but also an abstract notion like justice) relates to another one. It was increasingly highlighted during the Middle Periods in connection with stories concerning the wise rule of pre-Islamic characters like Alexander the Great and the Sasanian emperor Anushirvan. The image and its popularity sensitised the ruling circles not only toward the imperatives of governance stability but also toward its obverse, namely the fragility of the social bond, expressed by the risk of missing one of the connections or transmissions among the spikes in the wheel, and reflecting the looming danger of socio-political anarchy.

While in the Westphalian political theology anarchy is a sin that Leviathan simply exorcises at its very moment of constitution, embodied in the *magnus homo* who organically envelopes in himself all individual bodies, in the Ottoman case we observe a more 'sociological' articulation of normative connectedness that allows for a relative autonomy of the entities interacting in the circle. A circle is a circle, it is neither an organic body, nor a ladder or pyramid. Had the fourteenth-century Maghrebi scholar Ibn Khaldun highlighted the unstable cyclical character of state formation and its causes in social dynamics through which tribal solidarity overwhelms urban civility, the Ottomans enacted in their own trajectory a capacity to stabilise the cycle through upgrading the

almost shamanic charisma of the tribal warrior chief into the dispenser of a higher, yet sociologically grounded level of circulatory justice. The vicious circle of Khaldunian instability now yielded to the virtuous 'circle of justice'. During Ottoman early modernity several scholars, including higher '*ulama*', studied and translated Ibn Khaldun. They also expanded on his arguments in order to highlight the positive nexus between instability and stabilisation. This operation required matching charisma with a model justice that literally circulates through the relatively autonomous, yet complementary organs and limbs of the socio-political body. This happens, however, unlike the Leviathan model, without submerging this circulation into the body of a Leviathan incorporating each and every subject.

Westphalian and Weberian binaries, comparable to those between corporation and institution, private and public law, person and office, or state and civil society, were not absent but did not crystallise into entrenched dichotomies. While a Weberist (more than a reflexively Weberian) view would impute the lack of a sharp differentiation to the 'patrimonialism' of political rule in an Ottoman, or more broadly Islamicate, context, paying adequate attention to the circle of justice provides a first help out of this conceptual and comparative impasse. One step further, however, is required by focusing on how the key Islamic institution represented by the *waqf*, the pious endowment, concurred in bridging the gap between what we would call, anachronistically, a profit-oriented sector and a non-profit, charitable one and instituting the privileged channel for building public spaces and services. The *waqf*, as a kind of supra-institution, could even be seen as the veritable key to a 'political theology of development' writ Islamic. Weber himself considered the endowment as a third comparative genus, alongside corporation and institution – one integral to the grey zone in-between, which we previously highlighted. He explicitly mentioned the *waqf* as one leading example of this third category. But he did not go much further than that in the work of categorisation, and this precious insight did not impact his more general typologies (Weber, 1980 [1921–22]: 429).

As a quite ubiquitous institution within the entirety of the Islamicate domain, the *waqf* financed health, educational, and infrastructural services. It was used to fund colleges, libraries, hospitals, medical dispensaries, markets, squares, soup kitchens, Sufi lodges, large mosques, caravanserais, cemeteries, burial societies, but also farms. Endowers were typically members of ruling families and wealthy courtiers and merchants, who so competed among themselves to establish ties of trust and loyalty with members and groups belonging to the lower classes (so defined on the basis on social conditions, like the urban poor, widows, and orphans, or of locales and neighbourhoods where they dwelled). Prior to his posthumous charismatic elevation, Amir Timur acquired

legitimacy by perfecting the ruling approach to *waqf* and promoting the building of veritable educational-charitable complexes (Arjomand, 2004). Typically, this systematisation of this approach to *waqf* that started in the Later Middle Period consisted in locating the mausoleum of a saint in the centre of such complexes, so that the saintly charisma could shine back on the sovereign-endower. The charismatic sovereign, now acknowledged as a receptacle of *walaya*, often entertained a privileged relationship to the Sufi leadership, now ever more occupying the centre of the educational-charitable complex of the major cities. The infrastructure funded by the *waqf* contributed decisively also to the long-distance exchange economy in the Silk Road, especially in such nodes like Samarkand and Buchara.

Conceiving of *waqf* as the crucial pre-colonial tool of urban development and commercial connectivity (which in turn produced wealth that could be partly redistributed through new endowments), it is remarkable how its legal status, administrative practices, and socio-economic impact could be adapted to widely varying circumstances historically and geographically. Its non-incorporated status favoured this adaptability, alongside a scalable formalisation of rules and accountability patterns (Hennigan, 2004). This was not a purely regulative matter, as it best reflected the original, theological fundament according to which a single *waqf* originated from a pious commitment to doing good to others in need, who in turn were the beneficiaries less of the individual endowing act than of the mercy of the ultimate Other, God. It is this type of theology, and its reflection in legal regulation, that makes the *waqf*, strictly speaking, neither private nor public (not even legally), but rather a supra-institution occupying a 'third' space (Salvatore, 2016: 119).

Being based on a solid legal framework and on a rich and adaptable jurisprudential practice, *waqf* management would be able to stand a rigorous Weberian test of legal rationality. The same would apply to its underlying political theology, even if the model differed from the patterns of legal subjectivity and accountability that developed through the corporations and institutions of late-medieval European cities. Quite remarkably, early modern Ottoman rulers, even if their authority was now vested with a strong charisma inherent in their offices, preferred to pursue what we would call public policies by endowing *waqf* rather than through bureaucratic means (Gerber, 2002: 75). Overall, the non-governmental supra-institution of the *waqf* 'proved to be malleable enough to support the power of centralised imperial formations' (Salvatore, 2016: 174).

Whether on the side of power centralisation or of the building of solid regulative frameworks of voluntary action, the Ottoman case here appears as borderline for being the most strongly Western-influenced instantiation of the state-formation arising from Central Asian nomadic

confederations feeding into, and being influenced by, earlier Islamicate dynamics: Western, however, less in the Weberian sense of 'Occidental', than in the important double sense of absorbing the Maghrebi lessons of Ibn Khaldun through the circle of justice (Salvatore, 2018b), and because arising from within the 'Wild West' of 'Eastphalia', namely Anatolia and the Balkans. It is also, and quite obviously, the best case we can invoke to clarify the extent to which Asian dynamics were not airtight, not even before the onset of European colonialism. Furthermore, this is also a privileged site to analyse a trajectory of state formation and the role of religious charisma at the crucial intersection of European and Asian patterns of political theology. Last, it is the case that ultimately produced the first and most consistent postcolonial secular state outside of a direct European colonial purview, namely the Republic of Turkey.

For sure, in spite of the accumulation of new studies proving the dynamism of the Ottoman Empire in the modern era (and a certain level of religiopolitical continuity between it and the Republic of Turkey in spite of the latter's emphasis on secular rule), this mighty rival of the European states of the Westphalian era seemed able to get along, in comparison with them, by dispensing of a fully autonomous legitimisation and a radical centralisation of power. We would look in vain for a strongly ideological nexus between corporate centralisation and a determination of individual subjective rights framed in the context of that form of power, i.e. via the state's guarantee of contractual autonomy and a corresponding mechanism to protect and promote individual property and, later, individual rights. While the modern Ottoman state relentlessly pursued a centralisation of power and was even able to increase its power through an astute management of centrifugal processes (Barkey, 2008), it did not acquire the kind of ideologically pinpointed, organically self-entrenched, self-legitimising political sovereignty that the European states attained by appropriating, metamorphosing, and inverting some of the sacral features of the church as a corporate body.

Epilogue: the ambivalence of colonial and postcolonial reconstructions of the body-politic

The articulation of political theology as seen from the viewpoint of the vast and diversified Islamic ecumene was sensibly altered by the shift between precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial socio-political modernities. While the main focus of this piece has been on processes of charismatic formation of sovereign powers 'East of Westphalia' which were roughly contemporary to (and partly preceded) the constitution

of Leviathan, one can offer here some preliminary reflections on how the genuinely Latin Christian (and therefore 'Western') theoretical and imaginative scheme which we often – though imperfectly – subsume under the banner of political theology can still make sense within colonial and postcolonial Islamicate and Asian contexts, and at which conditions.

We would need to approach a view of how such political theologies, once organised juridically and politically in the form of postcolonial Westphalian states, have been subjected to original reconstruction. Based on the previous analysis, we have here to do not only with the trauma of the just mentioned tension between two quite different types of modernity, and which profoundly affected the relations between ruling elites and populations. One needs here also to understand how new notions of governance developed under the postcolonial urgency to reintegrate the colonial Westphalian parameters of state rule and legitimacy within the inherited, precolonial, Islamicate, or Asian patterns, wherever possible.

It is also important to be aware that there is little, if anything, exceptionally and specifically Islamic in the patterns of Western challenges and Muslim responses during the age of colonialism. Intellectuals from various parts of Asia were active within the emerging public spheres of their countries and worked on ideas of progress, tradition and religion that had been already made to fit the hegemonic reality of nation-states in Europe. These categories were however seldom the harbinger of pro-Western feelings. They more often provided ideational and argumentative arsenals to anti-colonial campaigns, like in China and Japan, where popular leaders even founded 'new religions', often taking the form of 'redemptive societies' with mass appeal (Duara, 2015: 175–94). They stressed universalist cosmologies centred on moral self-transformation envisioning a connective justice cutting across barriers separating communities, cultures, classes and gender divides. As emphasised by Prasenjit (Duara, 2015: 157–74), however, such efforts also responded to patterns of confessionalisation largely vectored by European hegemony, which entailed a de-pluralisation pressure on traditional religious commitments available in a given, now largely national, community. This is why in the course of this complex process and most notably from the end of the nineteenth century, Asian state formations variably exposed to direct or indirect European colonial presence or pressure started to adopt and adapt this model. What Duara omits to signal, however, is that the precursor of such an 'Eastphalian' confessionalisation was, once again, the Ottoman Empire, with some historians locating the beginnings of the process as far back as the sixteenth century if not earlier, therefore in a decidedly precolonial era (Krstic, 2017).

Yet, in the colonial era, the process unfolding through Asia reinforced the tendency of anti-colonial politics to privilege a strongly identitarian type of confessional mobilisation in response to the colonial encroachment. The most successful such case (admired and taken as a model by several Muslim reformers) was the so-called Meiji Restoration of 1868 in Japan, through which the reconstituted Japanese state absorbed the anti-colonial movement within its newly branded confessional nationalism centred on the cult of the Emperor. Confessional nationalism featured importantly yet ambivalently in the Asian transformations also because European colonial powers often tried to implement the secular side of their modernising projects (like severing religious from political identities) more intensely in the colonies (e.g., in Southeast Asia) than they were able or willing to do in the metropolises.

According to Saba Mahmood, the Islamic component of the reconstruction of such a double rail of confessionalism-*cum*-secularism within post-colonial Muslim majority states boils down to a thin ideological crust overlaying a Westphalian disciplinary apparatus, through which the control of the religious field is imposed as an instrument for de-politicising society (Mahmood, 2015). The path to this form of sovereignty required imitating a 'totalisation' of the way religious charisma can be institutionalised in an organic state form, which is the inheritance of the Latin Christian political theology without equivalent within pre-colonial Islamic traditions.

In the Ottoman case the trajectory of strong exposure to such pressures, coinciding with the exhaustion of the long haul of the early modern Suleymanic model, started toward the end of the eighteenth century. The geo-political competition between the Ottomans and Russia was also associated with patterns of mutual influence through which the two empires tried to reconstruct their ruling charisma. The Ottoman sultan seized the occasion of the peace treaty of Küçük Kaynarca of 1774 to lend international juridical legitimacy and a stronger domestic ideological force to the old caliphal title. The reinvention of a tradition of caliphal continuity mirrored the religious authority that the czar claimed over the Christian Orthodox populations of the Ottoman Empire, in what appeared as a mutual exception to the Westphalian principle of territoriality of sovereign power. The process of stabilising the caliphal prerogatives into a new type of legitimacy of Ottoman rule implied a charisma supposed to radiate also beyond Ottoman boundaries (in this case over the Tartars of Crimea, after its Ottoman loss to Russia), as implied by the caliphal title – a charisma both traditionally sanctified and now internationally recognised within the Westphalian system, which increasingly allowed for discrete extra-territorial exceptions to suit Western interests outside of Europe.

This model did not yield any political stability bonus, since the Ottoman Empire was clearly on a losing streak against European colonialism. The process proved ultimately inconclusive, probably even aggravating the European perception of the Ottoman Empire as the Sick Man of Europe, in need of the modernising and civilising redemption by European powers. It is also questionable that this renewed caliphal charisma came close to configuring an 'Islamic sovereignty' in its own right, fully authorising the Ottoman ruler to represent the 'Islamic people' (Schulze, 2003 [1994]: 27–9). Therefore, it cannot be considered as a strategic move to construct and legitimise a full-fledged, competitive, though belated Muslim Leviathan. The Ottoman, like the other early modern Muslim empires and their courts, were never willing to devise a clear-cut political myth comparable to Hobbes's *magnus homo*, which European powers had been able to wed to the juridical apparatus of the Westphalian order during the seventeenth century.

The impossibility of an Ottoman Muslim Leviathan became an evident liability when in the 1820s a communal resistance in the Peloponnese led to a nationalist independence movement in what happened to be 'Greece', a national idea anachronistically supported by the Romantic imagination of European public opinion and political actors. The success of Greek independence irreversibly put the ethnoreligious community on the map of the empire. The age of nationalism had started, later confirmed by how, as a result of the Central Asian 'Great Game', what is still Afghanistan became a national project exposed to, and dependent on, European interventions. This development was paralleled by the national unification processes of Italy and Germany around the same period. Egypt itself became a crucial case through an initially autochthonous project promoted by the independent ruler Mehmet Ali, and the Balkans (Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania, and Albania) followed up (Yaycioglu, 2018: 450–3). Saba Mahmood argues that in the process 'while Islamic concepts and practices have played a role, far more consequential is their realignment to fit a governing rationality' (Mahmood, 2015: 81). This being unquestionable, one should however recognise that basically all successor states of the Ottoman Empire have engaged in a process of reconstruction of parameters of confessional-secular alignment that can hardly be reduced to a single model, matching the imperative to solidify a majority identity and with some degree of protection of minorities. The process went hand in hand with a nationalisation of *waqf* and the erasure of its original institutional dynamism as an autonomous trigger of development and guarantor of solidarity.

The absence of a consistent Muslim Leviathan bolstering national cohesion and state legitimacy weakens the above-mentioned interpretation,

supported by Saba Mahmood, of a quite sharp, rigorously unidirectional metamorphosis. This is the view according to which during the colonial era in the Ottoman realm (but also beyond it, within what to European eyes appeared as an amorphous 'Muslim world': Aydin 2017), there merely was a bundle of lacks and deficits of Westphalian benchmarks. A view of Islamicate systems as inherently deprived of any legitimation of political power (religious or otherwise), and essentially based on society's self-organisation through largely autonomous religious and legal powers, can only be valid for the interval between the demise of centralised caliphal power and the rise of the Mongol and Timurid empires.

It is therefore problematic to see, with Mahmood, society's self-organisation as representing the political reality of the 'Muslim world' at the moment of the colonial impact. One cannot speak of an irresistible pressure to embracing wholesale the Westphalian method of an authorisation of religion via state law; neither can one reduce the making of a docile religious field to the sovereign task of shaping and disciplining society through the self-perpetuating hubris of the regulative powers of the state, while in reality disempowering the traditional loci of societal autonomy (Salvatore, 2016). The impossibility of a Muslim Leviathan does not by itself entail the ultimate erasure of all endogenous Islamicate modern patterns of state formation and transformation. While deepening the investigation of the complex postcolonial outcome of statehood and political theology would need a separate study, suffice here to note that it wasn't entirely by chance that some iconographic representations of the role of the ruler within the circle of justice were appropriated by nobody less than the leading secular Turkish moderniser Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.[2]

In a sympathetic dialogue with Hallaq (2013), I maintain that what has proven to be impossible in an Islamicate context is not a legitimate modern state per se but a reproduction of a sacralised yet artificial collective body, the *machina machinarum* of Hobbes, which indeed needed to rely on organic forms of solidarity within the surging national community. This being a token of European exceptionalism and of the only political impossibility in the precolonial Islamic ecumene, the interpretive and practical possibility has been ever since open to developing original socio-political modernities rooted in precolonial developments and appropriated by colonial and postcolonial states in various degrees – whereby the phenomenon called Islamism has also played an increasingly momentous role (but this is a different story).

3

The yogic ethic and the spirit of development

Sunila S. Kale and Christian Lee Novetzke

On 27 September 2014 the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, appeared in New York before the General Assembly of the United Nations to deliver his first speech to the international political community. As political speeches go, it was rather customary in its grand proclamations, sweeping vision, and declarations about India's place in the global community, particularly its burgeoning economy and struggles with international terrorism. However, Prime Minister Modi had a surprise for his listeners at the end, when he asserted:

> Yoga is an invaluable gift of our ancient tradition. Yoga embodies unity of mind and body; thought and action; restraint and fulfilment; harmony between man and nature; a holistic approach to health and well-being … it can help us deal with climate change. Let us work towards adopting an International Yoga Day (United Nations, 2014).

His rationale in pressing for a UN-declared International Yoga Day was equally startling: that the practice of yoga, one of India's signal contributions to global human culture, could 'help us deal with climate change'.

Modi's assertion that yoga bears a relation to climate change must be understood in the context of international environmental politics. Throughout the negotiations for the Kyoto Protocol (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 1997), India had been a leader in arguing for the rights of low-income countries. As India's representatives argued, the predicament of climate change is the result of the West's long use of carbon fuels to propel industrial growth. Should India and other low-income countries be deprived of this key engine of modernisation? Prime Minister Modi's statement about yoga was a

political statement, a declaration that while the West had given the world the technologies of the industrial revolution yoked to the liberal values of the enlightenment, India had given the world the possibility of spiritual transformation through yoga, a technology of self-control. It was also a move in the ongoing politics of international climate management.[1] Yoga, as control of the self, was displayed here as both a means to divert a political argument among nations about carbon emissions and development, but also a technique, one predicated on negotiating the relationship between a 'self' and its 'other' – other people, other nations, the natural world, society, and beyond.

While many commentators registered Prime Minister Modi's emphasis on yoga as highly unusual, the connection between yoga, power, and politics is as old as the practice of yoga itself. The first appearance of yoga as a term that names a thing one does occurs in the ancient *Ṛg Veda* (c. 1500 BCE). In that text, the word refers to aspects of war, especially harnessing a horse to a chariot, and by extension, to the harnessing of poetic metre, truth, and righteousness (White, 2011: 3; Mallinson and Singleton, 2017: xiii; Samuel, 2008: 113, 183). In several places in the text, yoga simply means 'war' (Jamison and Brereton, 2014; Nooten and Holland, 1994).[2] Nowhere, in the *Ṛg Veda*, however, does yoga indicate the kinds of breathing exercises, meditative practices, or body positions that come to be associated with the term 'yoga' from the sixth century BCE onwards. This is all the more interesting when one notes that the *Ṛg Veda* also appears to record groups of people (most likely men) called *keśin*s, who grew their hair long, lived outside of society, and practiced fierce austerities – a description that might apply to the Indian yogi (Jamison and Brereton, 2014: 10.136). Yet nowhere in the *Ṛg Veda* is the word 'yoga' associated with what the *keśin*s do.

In other words, the oldest use of the term yoga, which is contained in the *Ṛg Veda*, indicates things one does in the context of war and battle, the world of politics. Political theorists from Carl von Clausewitz to Carl Schmitt and Achille Mbembe have said war may be considered the ultimate expression of politics (Clausewitz, 2008). At its origin, the term yoga was used to name the nexus between war and the individual, between control of the self and control of the other. This earliest meaning of the term indexes what we identify as 'the political' in our chapter: politics is the negotiation between the self and its others in a world of agonistic relationships.[3] It is this idea that seems to give meaning to the concept of 'yoga' as a thing one does in the *Ṛg Veda*. It would be at least another 1,000 years before yoga would move on from the realm of warriors and kings to that of meditative spiritual pursuit. It is only with Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra*s (c. sixth century CE)[4]

that yoga comes primarily to mean a system for controlling the mind and body, a mode for achieving the 'cessation of thought'. But even in Patanjali, and later in the many systems of *haṭha* yoga that would emerge, an emphasis always remained on the idea of yoga as preparation for facing some struggle although the object and site shifted from war to other agonistic subjects: physical health, spiritual pursuit, mastery of the self and others, and the conquest of rebirth itself. The yoga of modern-day tight pants and thin mats is still, in essence, a negotiation between the self and its other – the body, consumerist society, human relations in the world. This is the starting point for our exploration of the political idea of yoga, to understand how yoga is a tool in the politics of social being.

We see in the long history of yoga in India that the worlds of political power, statecraft, and sovereignty explicitly intersect with this technology of the self. Long patronised by royal and elite benefactors, yoga's existence on the subcontinent and its conveyance outside India – via Buddhism to East and Southeast Asia – testify to its importance in the fields of power, religion and politics, as well as international trade. By the fifteenth century in India, kings and powerful householders of all sorts had turned toward yoga, out of curiosity perhaps, or perhaps to find advantage in life. At the same time, the rise of 'political Islam' on the subcontinent, exemplified by the ascension of Sultanate power in the thirteenth century and later Mughal rule in the early sixteenth century, had likewise come to absorb and adopt yoga, both within Sufi contexts, but also through the curiosity of figures like the sixteenth-century Mughal emperor, Akbar (c. 1542–1605). At the same time, yogis organised themselves into social and political units, often composed of highly-skilled soldiers as well as diplomats; yogis were part of the military, political, and economic landscape of India, as much as they were part of its spiritual, monastic, and religious worlds. Yoga became a practice shared among religious groups, political orders, organised bands of warriors and the armies of kings, even linking quotidian householders to one another, often through a guru or a particular 'style' of yoga like Natha and *haṭha* yoga practices (Pinch, 2006). Indeed, the political power of the Natha Yogis has endured from the medieval period to the present as is clear from the rise to power of Yogi Adityanath, the current Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh – India's largest state – who is also a *mahant* or chief monk of the Gorakhnath Natha monastery.[5] When yoga emerged on the modern world stage in the late nineteenth century, it did so already well equipped with a history of global interaction with and adaptation to fields of power. Yoga has always offered a way to negotiate the self amid myriad other forces, and we argue that this essence of yoga as a political idea runs from the chariots of the *Ṛg Veda* to Modi's first speech at the UN.

In this chapter, we examine these ideas about yoga's long intersection with the world of politics and political thought by examining the writings and thought of the most enduring of India's many political theorists, M.K. Gandhi. Though by no means the first, or the last, to embody yoga as a political idea, Gandhi's global significance and full articulation of yoga as political theology is the ideal case subject for the speculations and reflections on political theology represented in the organising thesis of this volume and its many different chapters. Our contribution plays with the volume's themes of 'political theology' and 'development' through our focus on yoga and the ideologies articulated by Gandhi.

Yoga as political theology

Our chapter is about yoga, but not the yoga restricted to the iconic positions and breathing exercises we know as yoga today. The contemporary emphasis on yoga as a mind-body system – psychophysical yoga – may mean that we have lost some of the intellectual and ideological history of the vast thought systems and practices that exist under the name 'yoga'. Our interest here is to explore what political or philosophical ideas dwell at the core of the many practices associated with the term yoga. In spirit with the volume's themes, we also ask how these ideas may play a role in some strands of India's conceptualisation of development.

Our definition of political theology is general, drawn from an overview of those who have used the term, and those – like Hegel, Nietzsche, Marx, Kant, Weber, and others – who did not use the term, but nonetheless saw that political concepts at the heart of Western modernity were, in their origin, Christian or otherwise religiously rooted theological concepts. And so our guiding principle is to understand by political theology the trace of the premodern in that Western sense, and in this case, the religious, within modern political concepts, but also to do so through the non-Western lens of Indic thought, then and now. We do not call political theologies 'secularised' concepts as this presupposes the notion that the concept in question has been evacuated of its religious or theological content. That is no truer of the ideas emerging from India that we will discuss than it is of Kant's categorical imperatives drawn from Christian moralisms, or Carl Schmitt's sovereignty extracted from a juridical enchanted cosmos during the National Socialist period in Germany. Political theologies are the very opposite of secularised concepts in our estimation, and so we go against the grain of Schmitt's influential formulation. They are what they sound like: religious ideas that inform political theory and ideology. These ideas don't necessarily or even usually

shed their confessional natures just because they take on political force. Moreover, yoga as politics – and we suspect the origins of many other politico-theological concepts – arises in a time before the separation of religious and secular orders as a notional formality of modern liberal democracies. To presume that one can trace the origins of one in the other, then, is anachronistic at best and at worst loses an opportunity to probe at the fissures and gaps that continue to haunt the presumed separation of the religious from the secular in the present. Indeed, the very concept of 'development' has often been infused with so-called 'religious' concepts, such as manifest destiny, the divine right of nations, the calling of world leaders, and so on. Religion, in other words, has already informed some essential concepts of development, of teleology, itself.

A curious fact about yoga, from the point of view of political theology, is the way in which yoga inverts the usual paradigm of political theology. A common, if increasingly contested, understanding of political theology is that a theological idea transforms over time to become a generalised and rationalised principle of a society or state, unmoored from its theological origins, often described as a 'secularised' concept. The classic example might be Schmitt's idea of sovereignty, but we can also see this concept at play in the ideas of Hegel, Weber, Foucault, and many others. In each case there is an ideational movement from the religious to the secular political. What is interesting about yoga, by contrast, is that it first emerges in Indic thought outside a formal theological or orthodox parameter of a given religious sect or practice. Instead, yoga is an idea forged in relation to war and violence. As we've noted above, the first uses of the term yoga, set some 4,000 years ago in the *Ṛg Veda,* suggests the origins of yoga within martial and political fields, not those of a hermetically sealed religion or spirituality.

David Gordon White speculates that the trace of how yoga was understood in the *Ṛg Veda* as pointed out above led to the idea of being committed to one's actions – by the time of the Indian epic *The Mahabharata* (c. sixth century BCE) the warrior was himself referred to as in a state of *yoga*, that is 'yoked to yoga', yoked to war and to the possibility of a violent death (White, 2011: 3). Other very early references to yoga describe equipping an army, fixing an arrow in a bow, and donning armour for battle (Monier-Williams, 1961: 856). This commitment to battle also served political solutions, for warriors yoked to battle were fierce, and their commitment to war could help dissuade a hesitant opponent, an opponent without 'yoga'. Indeed, yoga even came to mean war itself, as White points out. The word yoga indicated having yoked or controlled the lands of an enemy, having secured prosperity through war, domination, and victory. And it could also indicate to 'yoke' or control

one's own political lands, one's own sovereign political territory (Jamison and Brereton, 2014: 10.166.5). The acquisition of a thing – wealth, land, power, gain of all sorts – surrounded the earliest use of the term yoga, likely predating the use of the word to describe a psychophysical or spiritual activity (Monier-Williams, 1961: 856).

These connections between yoga and politics are apparent when we note the central importance of yoga in the classic Indic text the *Bhagavad Gītā*, a text Gandhi would one day use to express his own political yoga. Composed a little over two thousand years ago, the *Gītā* is the earliest text we have that fully expounds on a theory of yoga.[6] The *Gītā* seems to contain all the ideas of yoga that precede it – a commitment to battle, a system of self-control and self-understanding, a technique for defeating death – and much that will emerge with Patanjali some centuries later, such as techniques for stilling the mind and body and reaching different states of consciousness.[7] Yoga as a technique for transcending the self has long predated any material literary record, including the *Gītā*. The Buddha, for example, who sought solace from suffering, practiced yoga in this quest. Indeed, this may be why the *Gītā* takes up this very specific form of yoga as well, as a means to address the many Buddhists living in its era who would have practiced yoga in imitation of the Buddha, taking it with them as Buddhism spread to Southeast and East Asia – a practice of body and mind genealogically rooted in war and violence that may form the core of the Asian martial arts, such as Kung Fu and Karate. So encyclopaedic is the *Gītā* with regard to its engagement with yoga that it seems to display yoga as an ideology in search of various applications even while the encompassing narrative of the *Gītā* is mortal conflict. As Mallinson and Singleton have rendered it, yoga in the *Bhagavad Gītā* generally indicates 'equanimity, skill in action and separation'.[8] These are primary qualities for the warrior and ascetic alike.

The context for yoga in the *Gītā* is a conversation between Arjuna, a warrior who must face his family and friends as enemies in the midst of a civil war, and Krishna, a war charioteer. Arjuna cannot face killing his kin, and so unyokes himself from his chariot, as it were; he tries to surrender before the battle has even begun. Krishna, in response, delivers to Arjuna various rationales for carrying on the fight. These rationales Krishna calls yogas in a way that cannot be fully understood except in light of the use of this term in the martial contexts of the *Ṛg Veda*. The commitment to war and death is no doubt a part of human politics and so one origin of yoga can be located to a significant degree within the world of quotidian political power that the *Gītā* assumes. Yoga emerges in this theory from war, both literal war and war as metaphor.

But unlike the warrior-culture uses of the word in the *Ṛg Veda*, by the time of the *Gītā*, the idea of yoga as a disciplinary commitment fully embraces religious and spiritual contexts. For Krishna is not only a charioteer; he is also God. This idea of yoga bears a relationship to the earlier idea of a warrior committed to the battle. Both uses of the word provide a means to harness a divisive dialectic and to achieve a kind of freedom of the spirit, either in battle, or in rebirth. In the *Gītā*, yoga resolves the dialectic between friend and enemy, a subject so disturbingly interesting to Carl Schmitt for example, by means of the conquest of one's enemies through war, that is, through yoga. The text explains yoga as a way to distinguish the embodied self and immortal self. In all cases, freedom is a clear goal – the freedom from fear of death in battle, and the freedom of the soul from rebirth. As many modern scholars have noted, yoga is at its core a discipline, as well as a theory, of freedom. And freedom here is imagined as both spiritual and social, or as we have rendered it, political.

Through the intervening centuries, yoga would transform through a process of accretion. More and more layers, types, techniques, and cultural contexts would take up the core discipline of yoga in new ways. Buddhists, Hindus, Jains, Muslims, Christians, agnostics, atheists – all would develop new forms of yoga. The *Yoga Sutra*s attributed to Patanjali from around the fifth or sixth century of the Common Era offered a contemplative and meditative technique for the cessation of thought, action, and attachment, but even here Patanjali begins his text with a social declaration. The first requirement of an aspiring yogi, according to Patanjali, is to address social issues surrounding one's mundane life, a set of rules or *yama* common in many other texts about spiritual practices in Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism. This primary social discipline requires that a yogi be nonviolent, honest, and generous, and undertake a study of the self and self- motivations (Bryant, 2009: 243 [YS 2.30–32]). Edwin Bryant describes these *yamas* or ethics as 'a moral system' for which there are 'no exceptions' for the ambitious yogi (Bryant, 2009: 251–2). A social consideration is thus part of how one prepares oneself for all the physical, psychic, individualistic, and spiritual practices that come later. The first yoga described in the *Gītā* is likewise social. Krishna's initial retort to Arjuna is simply the demand that he must fight precisely because it is his social duty as a warrior (Patton, 2008: 2–3). The history of yoga links spiritual aspiration with social politics, that is, how to negotiate one's social being in the world. Yoga is first and foremost a tool of ontology, including social and political ontology.

Around the beginning of the second millennium, a strong record of physical yoga, called *haṭha* or 'forceful' yoga developed, which probably

signals that such yogic practices were much older. Hatha yoga addresses human desires ranging from the transcendence of material existence to such mundane things as relieving oneself of intestinal gas. The lexicon of positions or *āsana* that characterises modern yoga was detailed in texts from the medieval period, beginning as early as the thirteenth century. Texts such as the *Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā* of the fifteenth century are addressed not only to the heroic renunciate in a cave somewhere, but also to the average householder in the village or city. These texts suggest that yoga was likely a part of ordinary life in the medieval period, something between medicine and religion. Here yoga served as a medicinal practice for a wide range of common ailments, which is not unlike yoga today. Yoga was not only for the grand battles of life – on the battlefield or in the battle for enlightenment and spiritual freedom. Yoga was also for all those little battles we wage every day with nature and ourselves, the battles of ordinary existence.

Most importantly for our purposes, we should note how the *Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā* begins. Well before the complex positions or the breathing practices, the author tells his listener, 'The … yogi should live in … a country that is properly governed, virtuous, prosperous, and peaceful' (Akers, 2002: 1.12). And so the text that is at the root of what will become modern postural yoga begins by linking yoga and good political governance. The yogi, in other words, should pay close attention to politics whatever else he or she may do. Again, yoga compels a relationship between the self and its other, in this case, society.

Indeed, the medieval period saw the full fruition of yoga as a hybrid device for engaging military and cultural politics, especially between Hinduism and Islam. For example, Vijay Pinch (2006) and others have shown that bands of Hindu yogis collected into mercenary troops throughout the medieval period in India. They used their yoga for martial and political purposes, forcing negotiations about trade, land, and political honour. These were Hindu yogi-warriors in Mughal India, feared as opponents and prised as allies by such figures as the Mughal king Akbar, who evinced a particular interest in yogis. These bands of warrior yogis were a major problem for the British early in the colonial period, as during the Sannyasi rebellion in the late eighteenth century. These yogi 'rebels' also served as the inspiration for the anti-colonial novel *Ānandamaṭh* by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee in 1882.

The connection between yoga and a desire for a 'properly governed' country came to the fore in the colonial era around the figure of Mohandas K. Gandhi. Suketu Mehta, in a piece in the *New York Times* in March of 2012, referred to Gandhi as India's greatest teacher of yoga. Of course, what Mehta meant was not that Gandhi had taught the world modern

postural yoga, but rather the yoga of non-violent political mobilisation, the yoga of politics. Gandhi formulated this political yoga, in part, from his reading of the *Bhagavad Gītā*'s concept of yoga as equanimity and discipline in action. As Lloyd and Suzanne Rudolph point out in their book, *Postmodern Gandhi* (2008), Gandhi formulated his yogic practice around political action and renunciation, reinterpreting and actualising the *karma* yoga of the *Gītā*. When Winston Churchill derisively referred to Gandhi as a 'half-naked *fakir*', using an Indo-Arabic term for a yogi, his intended insult was also a statement of fact. Gandhi was a yogi who had mastered the yoga of public politics. And in the end the half-naked fakir got the better of his English rival in his bespoke suit.

And so yoga has always been interwoven with worlds of political power, in a place between the so-called secular and sacred. This has long been the history of yoga, and it remains a core principle of yoga today even if this is not the dominant idea of yoga in the trans-global popular cultural spaces in which it now stretches and twists. Narendra Modi's speech to the UN gestures toward this fact. In this way, the political theology of yoga contains the political and theological in symbiosis not in a teleological progression. The dual nature of yoga was evident in the ethics of the *Gītā*, as we saw, and becomes visible once again in the figure of Gandhi, who as a political and religious yogi epitomises this duality.

The political theology of Gandhi's yoga

We base our conjectures here about Gandhi's thought on his collected written works and on his recorded actions. In these materials, we can trace an evolving engagement with yoga. To be sure, Gandhi was an eclectic and catholic seeker of source material, as Prasanjit Duara (2015: 228) argues. To embody 'transcendence in the secular world', Gandhi ranged widely, drawing from Indian traditions like yoga and those arising from his homeland, Gujarat, to the anarchist and radical vegetarian ethics that he encountered through Tolstoy and in London. Here, however, our attention remains trained on yoga. While Gandhi would come to articulate a full political philosophy of yoga from 1922 onward, in the years leading up to this time, Gandhi was well aware of yogic texts in the psychophysical traditions, though these primarily seem to be Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* and the *Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā*. Gandhi first mentions yoga in his writing in 1908 as a means to self-control, and here he specifically cites Patanjali. From the 1880s to the 1920s, he appears to understand yoga as we have it today: a set of meditative techniques, positions, and breathing practices that calm and focus the mind, heal common ailments, and help

to provide resolve. Gandhi encounters yoga from the present backward, in a sense. For example, Gandhi notes in several letters to friends that a particular *āsana* might relieve some illness or another, or that a particular breathing technique might help calm a troubled mind. To several of his 'Young India' readers, including one man who struggled with excessive masturbation and feared that he was wasting his vitality rather than using it to advance the nation's freedom, Gandhi suggested the practice of yoga *āsanas* and breathing techniques might stay his desire (see Gandhi, 1969 for letter dates 2-9-1926). These do not seem to be political uses specifically but uses of yoga far more in line with the idea – both current and classical – that yoga is a psychophysical form of medicine, or in our currently popular generality, wellness. Though it is worth noting that with the conscientious onanist, Gandhi does give advice on how the young man might expend his energy in the service of the country's political future. Other than this, the one place in Gandhi's early writing that we see an opportunity for him to explicitly link yoga with a political aim involves not Indian nationalism but British resolve. He refers to Englishmen 'who go through the terrible strains of war without collapsing' suggesting that '[they] must be yogis'. (See Gandhi 1969 for 'Letter to C. F. Andrews', dated 23 May 1918). Somewhere in Gandhi's thought here is the idea that yoga is yet the tool of the warrior.

We see one notable place early on where Gandhi does explicitly link yoga and his own political ideology. This occurs when Gandhi calls the process of weaving cotton, *khādī,* on a wheel or *carakhā,* a form of yoga:

> Lastly comes weaving which is purely a matter of practice.
>
> One learns the principle in a day. The reader must not be surprised at the ease with which I claim processes can be learnt. All natural and necessary work is easy. Only it requires constant practice to become perfect, and it needs plodding. Ability to plod is *swaraj* [self-rule]. It is yoga. (See Gandhi, 1969 for Young India, 18-8-1921)

This is perhaps Gandhi's symbolic and material resistance to British colonialism's economically rapacious textile industry, but it also is a description of yoga: a matter of practice, easy when the principle is known, a skill in action, plodding, routine, but necessary. Yoga, we hear in Gandhi's comment, is self-rule, *svarāj* – this phrase foreshadows how Gandhi will draw together his political goal, self-rule for India, with yoga, skilful political action that inheres in the body. While this is not a direct political use of yoga, it is evocative because the spinning of *khādī* and the spinning wheel were key political symbols for Gandhi. The spinning wheel

was featured on one of the first prototypes of the Indian flag used by the Indian National Congress in the early 1930s. When he says that spinning *khādī* is a form of yoga, a metonym for self-rule, he is calling his mode of public political expression a form of yoga. In terms of development, this is significant. Gandhi's idea that Indians could spin their own cotton was a direct political assault on the avaricious colonial practices around textiles and industrial production, which systematically limited the ability of Indian manufacturers to compete with textile imports from Manchester and other British industrial towns. The spinning wheel is a reference to a kind of anti-Western style of development, the latter embodied in factories, mass production, relentless colonial extraction, and the mechanisation of production.

By 1922, we can see that Gandhi had fully associated the political act of spinning *khādī* with yoga, and he derived this idea from discovery, or rediscovery, of the political valences of the *Gītā*. In a letter Gandhi wrote in February of 1922 to Nehru, who was imprisoned in the Lucknow district jail, he says:

> You have *Song Celestial* [*Gītā*] with you. I cannot give you the inimitable translation of Edwin Arnold, but this is the rendering of the Sanskrit text. 'There is no waste of energy, there is no destruction in this. Even a little of this Dharma saves one from many a pitfall.' 'This Dharma' in the original refers to Karma Yoga, and the Karma Yoga of our age is the spinning-wheel. (Quoted in Nehru, 1958: 23–5)

Another way to put it: the war that Arjuna was compelled to fight on the principles of yoga as skilful action taught to him by Krishna are the same principles of conflict that the spinning wheel represents. Karma yoga is a way to fight a war, but a way that is, in Gandhi's estimation, a form of non-violent resistance to the economic, social, and legal structures of colonialism.

One month after writing this letter, and exactly one week after Nehru's release from jail, Gandhi found himself incarcerated near Pune for the crime of sedition against the colonial state. And like Nehru, and many other nationalists of his time – Lala Lajpat Rai, Sri Aurobindo, B. G. Tilak, K. B. Hedgewar – Gandhi took the *Bhagavad Gītā*, in the form of Edwin Arnold's translation, *The Song Celestial*, with him to prison.[9] It is at this point in 1922, behind the bars of colonialism, that Gandhi draws yoga into the core of his politics by undertaking a reading, translation, and commentary on the *Bhagavad Gītā*.[10] From this moment when Gandhi pulls the *Gītā* fully into his thinking, his idea of karma yoga becomes the key to his political theology. It is through his reading and translation work

that he links the *Gītā*'s yoga of action in battle to the idea of karma yoga, of action without attachment to the fruits of action. Through this idea, Gandhi is able to suggest that a text that is about convincing a man to kill his cousins, teachers, and uncle, is actually a text about non-violent resistance. For Gandhi, the key is unattached self-control that harnesses the self toward political action outside the self. In the *Gītā*, violence was the right outcome, and Arjuna needed to understand selfless action, karma yoga, in order to act. But in the nationalist period, the battle was different, though the need for self-control was the same. Gandhi reads the *Gītā*'s message to find that self-controlled action, karma yoga, during the colonial era meant refraining from violence and meeting one's enemy with selfless non-violent action. This political action, also called *satyāgraha* or 'grasping truth' and *anāsaktiyoga* or 'yoga without attachment', is what Gandhi names karma yoga. For Gandhi, this form of yoga is the very political ideology and political action that he taught. If for Carl Schmitt the political theology of Judeo-Christian monotheism gives us the juridical idea of the sovereign, the one who makes the exception, then for Gandhi, who is writing around the same time as Schmitt,[11] the sovereign is the one who has mastered the self. Schmitt's political theology is the politics of domination of others, whereas Gandhi's political theology strives for the freedom of the self in the midst of political subjugation; if Schmitt's sovereign is the political hegemon, Gandhi's sovereign is the detached actor. Gandhi refers to a passage of the *Gītā* that discusses 'Buddhi yoga', or the yoga of the intellect, and suggests that karma yoga is the 'sovereign yoga', the way for people in a colonised context to act as free people (Gandhi, 1969: Vol. 34: 39)[12] Gandhi, to adapt a phrase from Partha Chatterjee (2006), taught the yoga of the governed. These are articulations of what J. Barton Scott (2016) has called 'genealogies of self-rule', in India that intertwine European thought, even liberal thought, with Indian concepts of the ethical self, the 'worldly yogi'. We agree with Scott when he writes of Gandhi's political philosophy, 'a person should govern her body and behaviour in much the same way that a nation governs its territory – it being the transferability of technologies of self-rule between these different registers that comes to constitute the domain of the political as such' (2016: 209). Where Scott admirably argues for the influence of nineteenth-century 'culture of the self' in the swell of colonial-era political thought, we argue for the insertion of much older, and more endemic, technologies of the self-marshalled toward the political enemy, colonialism itself.

Gandhi took his cue here from the work of fellow nationalist Bal Gangadhar Tilak. In *Gītā Rahasya*, Tilak's commentary on the *Bhagavad Gītā* written in 1911, a text Gandhi studied in prison in 1922, Tilak felt

the *Gītā* was 'essentially a treatise on…*karma yoga*' (1915: xix, xxv). As Dipesh Chakrabarty and Rochona Majumdar (2010: 340–1) point out, for many political leaders, like Tilak and also Aurobindo, karma yoga was a political theology of resistance to British rule. Aurobindo even launched a weekly journal in 1909 called *Karmayogin* as a means to express his political ideas. When Gandhi took up this term in the 1920s, it was already fully formed as a political idea. And like Tilak, Gandhi produced his own commentaries on the *Gītā* from 1926 onwards, particularly in his 'Discourses on the *Gītā*' from 1926–1927. In 1929, he named his Gujarati translation of the *Gītā* 'Anasakti Yoga', or the 'The Yoga of Non-Attachment', a reference to what for Gandhi was the core idea of karma yoga, for whom the terms 'yoga' and 'karma yoga' would come to be ubiquitous.

Much has been said about Gandhi's ideas of karma yoga in terms of political action, and this certainly is at the core of Gandhi's political theology – drawing the theological ideas of karma yoga from the *Gītā* and applying them to political ideas of individual sovereignty in a colonial world. However, much less has been written about how Gandhi tied this political theology to his ideas about development. His clear association of yoga with the spinning wheel, and the spinning wheel's direct critique of Western colonial developmentalism, is something to consider here in the context of our shared study of Asian political theologies of development in this volume.

Unlike the corporate forms of political economy that Nehru and others were espousing in which the nation-state took its preeminent position as the organising locus for development, for Gandhi all development would be individual; anything collective that emerged would be secondary. Even the village system, about which many believe Gandhi had an unduly romantic view, was too large to become the organising principle of a new political economy. For Gandhi, the attention could only be on the self and emerge from the self's purification and ethical alignment first, that is, from karma yoga. The political self was purified through political action done on behalf of others and without personal attachment. Yoga would be the technique for achieving development that was not aimed at personal gain, development both of the self in the first instance and of society as a secondary effect of this primary emphasis. This is because Gandhi saw Western-style development as marked by a lack of self-control. The West, instead, was perfecting a version of development in which individual agency was given over to centralised systems of control, manifest in systems like the centralised electric grid (Kale, 2014) and large-scale units of industrial production. Yoga, for Gandhi, was this missing moral and technical tool, the idea that all development starts with self-control and

a theory of the self in society (Scott, 2016: 117). Yoga directly engages the problem of the social self.

Conclusion: yogic development?

This idea of development also bears a close relationship to Gandhi's understanding of how collective efforts might be achieved in the more directly political realm. As Devji (2012) has argued, Gandhi's commitment even in the Khilafat movement, which many of his contemporary critics saw as a misplaced allegiance to a cause that should be taken up by India's Muslims primarily, was rooted not in the affinities of kinship or the brotherhood in the nation, but in a politics of friendship that placed primacy on the individual. Here we see Gandhi's political commitments as directly rooted in yoga, a clear intersection of Gandhi's ideas with what we understand to be one of the core precepts of yoga as a political idea, that is its focus on the individual as opposed to the collective.

What seems to unify yoga in the forms we've discussed is the way yoga resolves the problem of the individual in society, another shared concern with Western modernity and much of its political theory.[13] In the case of yoga, any application that it might have to the political problem of collective action must first pass through the individual as both cog and microcosm, one instrument among many, and a metonym for the 'social body' itself. In emphasising this focus on the individual, our reading of yoga's political theology offers a way to query the stylised representations of East and West, Europe and Asia that developed during the European enlightenment and continue to hold sway today. Far from representing a culture in which the individual is subsumed to a collective that is often construed as dominated by a religious worldview, yoga gave rise to this preeminent technique of the individual. By contrast, one could argue that in Europe the most potent contemporary resolutions to the problem of the collective that subsumes the individual have emerged: the hierarchically organised church, the joint-stock company, and the dominant political form of the liberal nation-state, all formations of the modern that were rooted in religious ideas that migrated to the social imaginary of the secular, and from there, to Western developmentalism itself. Yoga transcends the dogmas of church structures, defies the legal confines of corporations, and evades the borders of nation-states. Yoga remains unconfined to any of these because it resists the collective locus; it is a technology of the individual first and foremost, an idea that Gandhi's politics exemplifies.

In terms of development, the political theology of yoga, focused on the problem of the individual, provides an interesting solution. Development is a difficulty of the collective in a Western context – of a population, a demographic, an economy, or a nation/state. Gandhi's individuated political theology of the self, his karma yoga, required a disassociation from the Western idea that development proceeded from the collective. Instead, for Gandhi, development was rooted in an individual reorientation toward desire and attachment. The self could develop only when it no longer slavishly acquired the norms of Western modernisation, a lock-step progression that Gandhi identified would be a likely malaise of postcolonial India. The karma yogi's philosophy of development is to return to the sovereignty of the self – development begins with the freedom of the individual. This is not only an Indic extension of the idea of yoga, but it is also Gandhi's political resistance to colonial and postcolonial Western developmentalism. It is worth noting that this is not the idea of development that Nehru and the Indian state would take up after Independence in 1947; Gandhi's karma yoga and its political ideas and hopes for a new yogic developmentalism seemed forgotten in the intervening years, dismissed as an unrealistic idealism that was necessary for the attainment of nationalism but useless once that goal was achieved. That is, until India's current Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, championed the political uses of yoga and the recovery of Gandhi's legacy, particular as a Hindu thinker, even while Modi's corporate ideas of development remain far removed from the ideals of Gandhi.

We have seen many transformations of yoga as an idea over millennia, far too many to register here in this short chapter. But the one we have traced – the idea of yoga as a discipline of the self set against problems of social and material conflict and development – draws a line from yoga's earliest uses to its quintessential political expression in the efforts of M. K. Gandhi and its revival and reinvention in the era of Narendra Modi and in the frame of an ascendant Hindu Right nationalist ideology. As students of the intellectual history and future of yoga as an idea, we are eager, and even anxious, to see what lies ahead.

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4

Managing Karbala: genealogies of Shi'a humanitarianism in Pakistan, England, and Iraq

Till Mostowlansky

Starting with the seminal work of Carl Schmitt (1985[1922]), scholars of political theology have always been interested in the examination of the religious roots of modern secular formations.[1] For instance, most recently, Wydra (2015) argues that 'transcendence' has had a continuous historical presence in political processes up to the present day. Applying this observation to the study of humanitarian reason, Fassin (2012) frames humanitarianism as a political theology that is historically rooted in Christianity. He situates his argument in a genealogical approach to humanitarianism as a global phenomenon, thereby seeking to identify the fertile ground – if not the origins – that enabled its rise. Based on ethnographic research on Twelver Shi'a[2] humanitarian networks since 2012, this chapter explores two questions that such a genealogical approach triggers: first, how far does the linearity of this approach take us in understanding the certainties that inform the present and, second, what alternatives do we have?

Fassin's genealogical take on humanitarianism has a lengthy prehistory, with forefathers ranging from Friedrich Nietzsche to Martin Heidegger to – now most prominently – Michel Foucault (1984). This approach has also emerged from a weighty history of foregrounding European or Western history and the role of Christianity in this regard. Yet, in Fassin's framework, Christianity remains an underdefined historical force, implicitly fixed to 'the West' as a cultural space, whose legacy has globally emanated in the form of humanitarianism. In contrast, in Talal Asad's genealogical study *Formations of the Secular*, which highlights the powerful transformation that secular differentiation has brought to Muslim thought, the author reminds us that 'the important thing … is not [these concepts'] origin (Western or non-Western)'; rather, emphasis

should be put on 'the forms of life that articulate them, the powers they release or enable' (Asad, 2003: 17).

Asad's reminder is an important call to resist the temptation to identify singular points of origin such as those that surface not only in Fassin's work, but also in studies of Islamic humanitarianism that sometimes mirror Fassin's genealogical and spatial linearity (Fauzia et al., 2018; Mostowlansky, 2019). Much of the literature that examines the social practices and institutions of Islamic humanitarianism within a global context has been shaped by two main lines of investigation. The first approach has focused on the historical examination of Islamic ideas of charity and philanthropy as providing the foundation for contemporary processes in the Muslim world (e.g., Bonner et al., 2003; Fauzia, 2013; Singer, 2008). The second approach, while often acknowledging the historical depth of Islamic concepts of philanthropy, has particularly highlighted the role of humanitarianism in today's Muslim societies (e.g., Atia, 2013; Benthall, 2016; Benthall and Bellion-Jourdon, 2009; Lacey and Benthall, 2014; Petersen, 2015). In both strands of research, the idea of a common Islamic core around which specific modes of humanitarian practice are formed remains pervasive. Despite efforts to problematise the modern distinction between religious and secular realms, this approach opens the door to old forms of cultural essentialism in new clothes. For instance, Petersen (2015: 17) observes an 'Islamic aid culture' that runs 'almost parallel to the institutionalisation of development aid'. In her view, Muslim NGOs are simultaneously rooted in both religious and secular contexts, move between the two and 'mix' elements from both. Inevitably, such frameworks propel long-lasting, critical debates about the meaning and value of syncretism (Leopold and Sinding Jensen, 2005) onto the humanitarian stage. Furthermore, Benthall (2016: 115) sees 'puripetal forces' at work in Islamic aid, using this neologism to describe the active pursuit of purity and distinction that some Muslim organisations have put forward under the conditions of contemporary humanitarianism and international development. As this chapter argues, there is much to be gained by critically assessing such processes of alignment and distinction, particularly when following Fountain's (2013) musings on the 'allergic' reactions that large-scale international institutions have to engaging with so-called 'faith-based' organisations. At the same time, the messiness of actual day-to-day humanitarian practices, which can only be captured through in-depth historical and ethnographic research, remains underexplored (Osella, 2019).

Reiterating Asad's (2003: 17) suggestion to look at the 'forms of life' that inhabit this comparative conundrum, this chapter takes an ethnographic approach to Shia humanitarian networks in order to revisit a set of salient

questions for studies in political theology and Islamic humanitarianism. These questions problematise ideas of linearity and chronology between specific theological and political forms and scrutinise the meaning of genealogy when social actors simultaneously employ fragments of theological discourse, economic practice, and political activism to justify their means and realise their agendas. Thus, in this chapter, I ask: How can we frame expressions of humanitarianism that are nurtured by the vocabulary of managerialism? And what are we meant to do when the genealogy of the theological lies in the political rather than vice versa?

In the following, I address these questions through an ethnographic exploration of Shiʿa humanitarian networks that span Asia, Europe, and Africa. I seek to do so by looking at these networks as being formed through the entanglement of discourses and practices that are constantly adapted and reworked. I thereby follow a notion of 'entanglement' (German: *Verflechtung*) that has gained much prominence in recent scholarship on global history (Conrad and Randeria, 2002): *Verflechtungsgeschichte* ('entangled history') analyses the emergence and intertwinement of networks whose very point of departure is a matter of debate. Rather than highlighting an essentialised genealogical origin, this approach is designed to investigate the intersecting and competing genealogies that make the present appear whole and certain. On the one hand, it opens up a take on political theology that allows one to think with and through the inherent messiness of ethnographic practice. At the same time, it goes beyond the notion of a priori defined political-theological forms whose boundaries are drawn according to their links to assumed traditions (Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, etc.) or their many denominations.

Against this backdrop, Shiʿa Islam has gained particular prominence in our geopolitical present, despite the fact that Shiʿas only make up 10 per cent of the world's Muslim population. Since the Iranian revolution in 1979, much literature on transnational Shiʿism has focused on Shiʿa politics as infused with revolt and protest against Western modernity (e.g., Cole and Keddie, 1985; Louer, 2008, 2012). From this vantage point, political action in Shiʿa contexts has been predominantly framed as based on theological principles, thereby constituting a counterforce to the ideal of secular statehood. At the same time, increasingly violent sectarian encounters between Shiʿa and Sunni factions in Pakistan (e.g., Fuchs, 2019; Khan, 2012) and many other places around the world have contributed to the image of Shiʿas as a socially, politically and theologically 'beleaguered' minority (Rieck, 2015). In this narrative, Shiʿas are victims who nevertheless have a clearly set political agenda and defend their claims militarily – if necessary, with support from the state of Iran.

In the following, I seek to ethnographically work through these complex genealogies using the examples of representatives of two charitable trusts that are part of Shiʿa humanitarian networks. I will first focus on an organisation in Pakistan and its humanitarian work as embedded in the vision of Muslim liberals. I will then discuss the trust's transnational links to England and the binding concept of 'meritocracy' that – as a derivative from managerial discourse and 'neoliberal culture' (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2001) – has transformed humanitarian work and practices of giving. Finally, I will turn to the idea of political action as a foundational moment of Shiʿa humanitarianism. I will attempt to show that this foundational moment is rooted not only in the politics of the modern nation-state, but that it goes back to early Islamic history and the Battle of Karbala, which provides a continuous source of inspiration for Shiʿa humanitarianism.

Humanitarian aspirations and the Muslim liberal

On a hot summer day in 2015, I was sitting in Kabir's office in Rawalpindi, Pakistan. Kabir volunteers as the managing trustee of one of the country's numerous family-run charitable trusts. Kabir's trust – his wife and mother are also among the trustees – emerged when his late father donated a piece of land for charitable purposes. After registering the endowment around 15 years ago, it took some time to construct the facilities and make the trust operational. Since 2008 Kabir's trust has been active in healthcare projects, education and the provisioning of humanitarian aid.

Kabir is an eloquent elderly man. He is a Twelver Shiʿa Muslim and a Sayyid – progeny of the Prophet Muhammad's family – and thus enjoys particular respect in the Shiʿa community. On that hot afternoon, we sat in his office and drank tea, the fan purring loudly from the ceiling. I began the conversation by asking why he and his family had started the trust, which now has several employees who work on projects in different parts of the country. Kabir responded that his late father had always seen Islam as being intimately linked to gaining knowledge and helping the needy. He then explained:

> One of the Prophet's titles is 'City of Knowledge' …, and he taught his followers that, to gain knowledge, they should go as far as China. In those days, China was considered the other end of the universe. China was not a Muslim country back then. … The very fact that he ordered his followers to do that was a reflection of the belief that knowledge should not be bound by religion, ethnicity or geography and that it is

> a global phenomenon. … The lesson from that is that, as Muslims, we have to be liberal minded when it comes to the spirit of helping other human beings.

During our conversation Kabir used a variety of examples to illustrate his humanitarian work and what he meant by 'the spirit of liberalism'. For instance, he told me that a few years ago, when the region of Sindh in southern Pakistan had again experienced devastating floods, his trust was active in distributing food rations. After Kabir's arrival in Sindh, a local volunteer addressed him, pointing to the long queue of people in front of the provisioning stations, and expressed his concern about the presence of several Hindu families waiting among the Muslim majority. According to Kabir, he replied: 'In my communication with you have I ever said to you that these donations are only for Muslims?' Backed by donors in England – whom he contacted via mobile phone on the spot – Kabir said that he insisted on the distribution of aid to the Hindu families and that, shortly afterwards, the Hindu families received their rations.

Kabir's charitable work and the 'moral economy' (Fassin, 2009: 2012) that underlies it shed light on a form of legitimacy that I have encountered in many other Shiʿa charitable trusts in Pakistan and elsewhere. In this regard, the categories 'humanity', 'humanitarian', and 'liberal' have often been of central importance. These categories, however, cannot be taken as given or assumed to be self-explanatory, nor are they necessarily linked to 'Western sociodicy' (Fassin, 2012: 248). Consider, for instance, Kabir's attempt at genealogical channelling – and here I mean the act of crafting the historical roots of the present – which drew on three central arguments.

First, he invoked the lengthy history of Islam as both a global and a charitable force. Referring to Islam's earliest sources, Kabir explained that Islam embraces all human beings. This contradicts Fassin's (2012: 248) notion of humanitarianism as *originally* sourced in 'the Christian World', with non-Western traditions as historical appendices. Instead, it recentres the pronounced importance of charity and alms-giving in the long view of Islamic history and theology (Singer, 2008).

Second, Kabir's understanding of being 'liberal minded' is closely linked to specific Twelver Shiʿa interpretations of charity. Here, 'liberal mindedness' is not a matter of economic or political liberalism; it is an attitude toward and interpretation of Islamic law. Most of my interlocutors who run or work with Shiʿa-inspired charitable trusts and position themselves as 'liberals' read the rulings of alms-giving in a way that allows them to distribute a portion of the donations to non-Muslims. Among the Shiʿas I have worked with, the predominant way to donate is

to give *khums*. *Khums* is a tax that is calculated on the basis of one-fifth of a person's annual net savings. Fifty per cent of this amount should go to proven Sayyids – progeny of the Prophet Muhammad – in need. The other 50 per cent is dedicated to the 'non-Sayyid needy', a formulation that offers room for interpretation. Depending on the degree of 'liberal mindedness' among donors and trustees, these 'needy' can be seen as part of a larger category of people that transcends religion and in which shared suffering uncovers basic humanity. As Kabir explained to me, this is a matter of 'philosophy', and it allows him to organise financial transactions according to both the requirements of Shiʿa law and the reality of trans-sectarian suffering in many parts of Pakistan.

Third, in this framework the genealogy of Islamic giving and its 'liberal' positioning in the Shiʿa present are intricately interwoven with the political. Many of my interlocutors among Shiʿa charity volunteers and donors explicitly expressed the hope for a return on their gift in the form of a positive assessment of their deeds on the Day of Judgement. At the same time, they also sought impacts in the present. On that sizzling afternoon in Rawalpindi, Kabir told me that he expected his charitable work and 'liberal' approach to contribute to 'national stability', to a politically more stable and less fragmented Pakistan that would be able to prosper. Such a state should be achieved by abandoning pre-defined labels of sect and ethnicity. Instead, within the framework of Shiʿa charitable principles, he sought to select people based on need and merit. Kabir called this 'ideal' intermingling of charity and the national-political 'meritocracy' – the merit-based fostering and empowerment of those who are able.

Kabir does not stand alone in his take on merit and the political. The transnational charitable networks that nurture his trust and its interventions have emerged from that very political-theological thought and the managerial spirit of competition, excellence and talent that Kabir described to me on that afternoon in Rawalpindi. In the next section, I seek to follow these conceptual categories – meritocracy and the political – along connections of Shiʿa kinship linking Pakistan and England.

Giving, need, and merit

I met Kabir for the first time in London in the spring of 2015. We both participated in a fund-raising event organised by a major UK-based Shiʿa charitable trust that supports many of his activities in Pakistan. We sat at the same table in a convention centre near Heathrow airport, watched the gala dinner performances, the auction and the pledges, and chatted about Pakistan over dinner. The event was professionally organised, structured

and polished, and Kabir's projects were represented in the exhibition hall, where colourful poster boards described how educational stipends improved children's lives, free-of-cost cataract surgery gave 'the gift of sight', and microfinance loans fostered women's entrepreneurship in various parts of Asia and Africa. Kabir called the event, in which around 600 people – women, men and children – had gathered under one roof, an 'eye-opener' that would not have been possible in Pakistan because of gender segregation and security concerns.

Many of the participants in the gala event were part of a wealthy class of UK citizens with Shi'a backgrounds. They were businessmen, medical doctors and religious scholars, pledging hundreds, thousands, even tens of thousands of pounds for projects in, among other places, Gaza, India, Iraq, Lebanon, Pakistan, and Tanzania. In some of these places, Shi'a Muslims are the beneficiaries of these donations, but in many others they are also Christians, Hindus, and Sunni Muslims.

Azim, founder and trustee of the UK trust, and Kabir met via the Internet several years ago. As they emphasised in our conversations, the emergence of the Internet, with e-mail and smartphone apps, has fundamentally altered the mechanics of charitable work. Individual trusts in Pakistan and other places in Asia used to be rather disconnected from wealthy charities in Europe prior to the advent of the Internet. Today, donations are submitted online and bank transfers made via apps. Application procedures and collaboration agreements between trusts are also dealt with via e-mail and WhatsApp. Azim, who is a successful businessman involved in trade between Brazil, Europe, and West Asia, sees himself as his trust's professional manager. He is proud of his organisation's zero administration costs and the fact that he himself carefully examines every application for support that his partners in 16 countries submit to him. He looks out for flaws in the project descriptions, emphasises sufficient textual and visual documentation, and checks the accounting details. Since the trust always receives more applications than it can fund, he attempts to sift out and choose those applicants that are – in his view – the 'best'. During an interview in 2014, he told me that only those who are truly needy and promising can be considered.

Azim and Kabir both agree on the principle of 'meritocracy'. By the term, they mean a calculative, rational assessment of need and suffering that is supposed to neutralise any potential bias introduced by Shi'a kinship, local nepotism, or deceptive applications.[3] In their view, those with the greatest potential for success among the needy should receive charitable support. In many ways, this resonates with recent research on the entanglement of economy and Islam in Egypt (Atia, 2013), India (Taylor, 2015), and Indonesia (Rudnyckyj, 2010) that highlights the

influence of 'neoliberal' discourses and practices. As Taylor (2015: 13) argues with respect to Muslim charity in the city of Lucknow, India, this process has had a transformative impact on the very concept of giving:

> Islamic scriptures have represented alms-giving as a purificatory ritual focused on the *donor*. … I term this orientation the 'purity ethic' of Islam. In contrast, reformers … are invoking different sets of Islamic scriptures and moral concerns that reorient the focus of *zakat*-giving from donors to *recipients* – according to a 'developmentalist ethic'. These developmentalist Muslims in Lucknow are less vocal about their own spiritual transformation through philanthropic giving, instead inquiring about the life of the gift *after* it is given.

Taylor's observation – which is based on research among Sunni institutions in Lucknow – also contributes to an understanding of the everyday mechanics of Shiʿa charity. It highlights how 'the culture of neoliberalism' (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2001) has not only reshaped the rhetoric of Islamic trusts, but altered a core focus of giving. While this 'neoliberal culture' has infused the charitable work of Azim and Kabir conceptually – through an altered relationship between donor and recipient and a new language of administration – we must take care not to confuse this process with Weberian presumptions of rationalisation, disenchantment or even secularisation. Rather, being itself based on a political-theological ontology and the belief system of money (Goodchild, 2009), this 'neoliberal culture' is linked to a broad range of religious movements and ideas of economic magic on a global scale (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2001: 19).

In the case of Azim's trust, such processes are reflected in the forms of spiritual guidance that have informed the organisation's activities since its foundation. In various conversations with Azim over the past few years, he has repeatedly told me about the 'driving force' of Fatimah, the youngest daughter of the Prophet Muhammad, who steers the trustees' decisions and effects miracles in the organisation's projects throughout Asia. For instance, wells can be built where no scientist would have thought it possible, and when the trustees and volunteers face major difficulties and decisions, she acts as a 'spiritual force' and 'ideas come to us', as Azim told me during a conversation in London in 2014.

Considering the complex interaction of norms of Shiʿa giving, economic concepts and a global discourse of humanitarianism, it seems appropriate to speak of several genealogical strands informing charitable practices. This goes beyond the mere transformation of religious principles, entailing the entanglement of these different strands which – ever-evolving – change each other's shape and content. In addition to the

strands already mentioned, political aspirations play an important role – both historically in Shiʿa Islam and for the trusts with which I have worked. In the following section, I seek to explore the political in contemporary Shiʿa humanitarianism as both a starting point and an ending point.

The politics of bread and water

As mentioned earlier, Kabir's humanitarian work out of Rawalpindi is motivated by his desire to bring 'national stability' to Pakistan. For him, to go beyond sectarian boundaries and distribute food rations to *all* starving people affected by floods in Sindh is an act that contributes to such stability; it prevents discontent and represents Pakistan as a nation unified by a loosely defined and inclusive Islam. In my research on Shiʿa humanitarian networks navigating between central, south and west Asia and Europe, I found such concerns with the national order of things to be an important factor. From struggles for religious land endowments (*waqf*) in India to malnourished babies in sanctioned Iran to the plight of Iraqis under the conditions of dictatorship and war to targetted killings in Pakistan, the politics of the nation-state were one important concern for my Shiʿa interlocutors, but not the only one. The data also reveal an emphasis on resisting oppression and 'inhumane' behaviour as related historically to the events of Karbala. In the Battle of Karbala in 680 CE, Imam Husayn – grandson of the Prophet Muhammad and the third Shiʿa Imam – was slaughtered along with his companions by the Umayyad caliph Yazid I, and women and children were taken into captivity. Today, Karbala is often remembered as a major injustice on which the foundation of a distinct Shiʿa identity is built, and it is still commemorated annually during Ashura in the month of Muharram. A great deal of literature has been published on the politics of Ashura, the aesthetics and performative variations of the rites, and their role in Shiʿa community formation around the world (e.g., Aghaie, 2004; Ayoub, 1978; Deeb, 2005; Korom, 2003). At the same time, little attention has been paid to the complexity of the political-theological legitimacy that Karbala offers to Shiʿa humanitarian practice.

Ashura is followed by a 40-day mourning period, at the end of which the Arbaʿeen pilgrimage to Karbala is undertaken. In Saddam Hussein's Iraq, the pilgrimage was banned, although local Shiʿas still performed it in secrecy. Foreigners were barred from participating in this event and only began doing so again after the US invasion and Saddam's fall in 2003. Today, like all public Shiʿa rites, Arbaʿeen is threatened by Islamic militancy, and violent incidents have become normalised. Nevertheless, Azim and

his friends from various places across Asia have regularly participated in the pilgrimage in order to raise money for aid and development projects in southern Iraq. Much like a sponsorship run, they find donors who are willing to donate money for each kilometre walked.

When I met Azim in London in the spring of 2015, he showed me pictures of himself sporting an event t-shirt that he had printed for the walk. He described the initiative as having emerged from the historical 'spirit of Karbala', which acknowledges human suffering, sacrifice and concerns for humanity. Then he said to me, 'Look, Till, I might be a follower of world politics, but I'm not interested in the politics of the world'. On a number of earlier occasions he had emphasised that, when looking at the world today, his main question was, 'Where is humanity? Where has it gone?' Azim never denied being political in his actions, but he placed importance on the fact that he did not support (nor was he supported by) any national government – not that of Iran, nor of Iraq, nor of the United Kingdom. At the same time, he made clear that his interest in humanitarianism and the very foundation of his charitable trust are rooted in the coming together of the historical experience of Shi'a suffering and the political event, both of which are intrinsic to the Battle of Karbala.

Aghaie (2004: 87) argues that the Battle of Karbala went through a period of reinterpretation in the 1960s and 1970s during the build-up to the Iranian revolution in 1979. In this reinterpretation, Iran's Pahlavi regime was equated to Caliph Yazid I, and ordinary Iranians were assigned the roles of the martyrs of Karbala (Ram, 1994). Much literature on this so-called 'Karbala Paradigm' has focused on the shift from ritualistic quietism to the revolutionary zeal that continues to this day (e.g., Aghaie, 2004; Deeb, 2006; Gilsenan, 1982; Keddie, 1983). In contrast, Szanto (2013) maintains that one should avoid looking at this process through the prism of linearity. Instead, she argues in favour of a more complex picture that allows for past, 'quietist' renderings of Karbala to be interpreted as political, and for contemporary ones to be seen as not necessarily inherently revolutionary. For the purposes of this chapter, it is important to acknowledge that Karbala has served as a trigger of political action – from everyday resistance to martyrdom in Iraq and Syria. At the same time, it should not be forgotten that this discourse has also been closely linked with universal ideas of mourning, humility, and humanity.

Against this backdrop, the very foundation of Azim's charitable trust is embedded in complex genealogies that defy the notion of monocausal origins and straightforward rootedness. This is exemplified in the act of formation: the moment in which Azim decided to form a charitable trust and to dedicate himself to humanitarian work, which he described to me as a 'Karbala moment'. During the month of Ramadan in the late 1990s,

a religious scholar in London informed him that there were villages in southern Iraq where the oppressed Shiʿa minority under Saddam's regime had to break their fast with bread and water instead of with the traditional dates. This news outraged and horrified Azim, and he began to develop an idea of how to support those people without raising the suspicion of the authorities. Through trusted Shiʿa networks, he established a system of vouchers that were distributed secretly among the population, allowing them to shop at selected grocery shops and butchers that could later cash in the vouchers to avoid interference by the state. Ever since, Azim's motivation and dedication to his trust have emanated from the idea of a specifically Shiʿa form of suffering that represents all deprived and oppressed humans around the world.

Over the years, Azim shared with me not only his thoughts about his humanitarian work, but also various books that inspired him to pursue these projects. In this regard, the religious scholar Ayatollah Sayyid Fadhel Hosseini Milani – born in Iraq and now a resident of London – has been of particular importance. In the course of my fieldwork, Azim gave me a series of books that had influenced him (e.g., Milani, 2011, 2016; Mahdi, 2016[1985]). He pointed to Milani's sections on charity in Islam, which provide insights into a way of reasoning that both follows Shiʿa theology and aspires to include all of humanity. Referring to charity in Islam, Milani, who is connected to the religious establishment in Iran and Iraq as well as to academic and philanthropic circles in London – thus writes, 'Giving and caring for others is an elemental characteristic of Islamic behaviour' (2011: 42). He then quickly moves on to the universal act of giving, from environment to the human body:

> Indeed, everything around us is a manifestation of giving. The sun has provided light and heat for millions of years, and continues to do so, for without it life on earth would not be possible. Forests provide the oxygen that sustains us in addition to the material with which to produce the millions of publications that educate and inform us. Our hearts beat to supply life – sustaining blood to other organs. All these manifestations demonstrate the significance of giving. (Milani, 2011: 42)

Milani's argument and, equally importantly, the humanitarian actions of my informants point to alternative ways of thinking about humanitarianism and its genealogies. Yet, how do these relate to existing reasoning on the genealogies of contemporary humanitarianism? In his examination of Médecins Sans Frontières' intervention in post-US-invasion Iraq, Fassin (2007) emphasises the central role of sacrifice in humanitarian work. In this regard, he underlines the enduring importance of 'the system

of Christian values' and the notion of the gift of life that derives from it (Fassin, 2007: 512). From this perspective, the very exchange in which this gift is embedded is shaped by the tacit fragment of a religious past that has found an afterlife in contemporary humanitarianism – a turn that we might call, given the academic weight of the argument, the 'Fassin moment'. In contrast, Azim's 'Karbala moment' is based on the continuous reinterpretation of an event of suffering in which the interaction between politics, theology and ethics constitutes the very foundation for action. Revolutionary Shiʿa nation-state politics, most prominently promoted by Iranian political actors in the second half of the twentieth century, are only one part of the story. My Shiʿa interlocutors working for charitable trusts often attempted to distance themselves from such a nationalising revolutionary stance. Rather, they sought to emphasise silent resistance – embodied in irreproachable work ethics, scrutiny, and transparent professionalism – against what they perceived as regimes of oppression that formed a common link throughout history, from Caliph Yazid I to famines and from Saddam Hussein's rule to income inequality.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this chapter, I proposed two questions to guide my analysis of Shiʿa humanitarianism as shaped by people and institutions in Pakistan, England, and Iraq. The first addressed the extent to which the notions of foundation and origin that underlie much of the literature on political theology – including on Islamic humanitarianism – are useful to understanding our present; the second entailed exploring alternative ways of looking at Shiʿa humanitarianism through the lens of political theology.

The first question has been addressed at length in historiography – most prominently in strands of global history – albeit not in research on political theology. While scholars have addressed non-linear, transnational entanglements, from the global power of sugar (Mintz, 1985) to German-Japanese nationalism (Conrad, 2010), little work has been done on the intricate nexus of theology, politics and the legacy of religious traditions. In this chapter, I have argued that – in order to do justice to the complexity of Shiʿa humanitarianism – it is useful to move away from a genealogical approach that assumes that an a priori theological foundation underlies contemporary humanitarian work.

Instead, and with respect to the second question asked in the introduction to this chapter, I suggested decentring the genealogical framework by moving away from linear connections and toward the notion of entanglement. From this point of view, genealogical connections are

not monocausal and unilinear; they are, rather, multipolar and multidirectional. For instance, when promoting a distinct Muslim liberal view, Kabir bundled the genealogical strings of Shiʿa tradition and giving, global humanitarianism and managerial discourse, thereby weaving together their contents beyond chronological recognition. In a similar vein, Kabir and Azim employed the concept of merit and a calculative vision of development, which have – as in many parts of the Muslim world – considerably altered the ways of giving. In this regard, we see elements of 'neoliberal' economic practice seeping into and taking root in ideas of Shiʿa charity.

Finally, leading back to the basics of political-theological reasoning, I discussed the event of the Battle of Karbala – and its constantly evolving reflections and reproductions in the present – as a central means by which Shiʿites translate mourning into humanitarian action. A remarkable aspect of the Battle of Karbala is that – as an inherently political encounter – it gave way to the formation of Shiʿism as a separate Islamic denomination. As the founding moment of a common identity, the battle and the practice of mourning the suffering of those who participated in it have shaped how my Shiʿa interlocutors view all of humanity's grievances today. Continuously reproduced in the ever-transforming commemoration of the political-theological event, their concern for humanity does not have a linear genealogy. Instead, through its ambivalent nature, Shiʿa humanitarianism provides points of connections to a broad range of ideologies and practices in past and present.

5

From blood, cast in cement: materialising the political in Thailand

Eli Elinoff

Introduction: what binds the political?

What binds the political? Scholars of political theology suggest that understanding the heart of the elusive question of 'the political' requires moving beyond secular frameworks to think through the spaces of overlap between the theological and the secular. 'Political theology' is typically traced back to Nazi jurist Carl Schmitt who tells us that all the secular political concepts of the modern state are 'theological in origin' (1985: 36).[1] Others who have explored this intersection between the secular, political, and the theological probe the voided space in which questions of political legitimacy meet the expansive emptiness of the 'immanent' (Lefort, 2006) or the 'extraordinary' (Wydra, 2015) captured by religious belief. These conceptualisations of the theo-political highlight a paradox in existing understandings of the state. On the one hand, the state – its institutions, laws, forms of violence, and its bureaucracies – is marked by highly material, densely social, omnipresent, almost mundane, institutions, practices, and debates. On the other, the tremendous power of the notion of the State, the force of its violence, the collection and mobilisation of its resources, and its moral authority to order and instantiate the political through its speech acts seem to defy conventional analysis.

In their highly detailed rendering of the history of English state formation, Corrigan and Sayer (1985) demonstrate how the state emerges as a tangible thing through the absorption of the religious and the repeated declarations of its existence in law and statute. The result of this history of enunciation, is that the state ends up *appearing* like a singular, perduring actor in opposition to the church and other deeply rooted forms of moral authority. The implications of Corrigana and Sayer's argument are precisely the opposite. They show us that the state is a historical product

of a kind of cultural revolution that needed to be made real again and again, over time. Indeed, Corrigan and Sayer's work followed on from efforts to complicate the hegemonic and singular perception of 'the State' (i.e. Abrams, 1988). In a similar vein, Timothy Mitchell argues that the perception is that the state has 'coherence, agency, and autonomy', however, instead of being a coherent thing the state is rather an 'effect' that emerges out of 'multiple arrangements that…create effects of agency and partial autonomy, with concrete consequences' (Mitchell, 2006: 177). Although these approaches to the state have been essential for recasting empirical attention toward the layered processes and complex, sometimes incoherent institutions that bind the state together, they also highlight the same ellusive quality to modern political organisation as the political theologies literature.[2] In this chapter, I suggest that considering the ways actors mobilise things in the aim of political transformation highlights a fertile meeting place between the seemingly immaterial questions at the heart of the political theologies literature and the more present, materially grounded literature surrounding studies of the state.

Elsewhere, I have argued that at stake in the contemporary crisis of the Thai state are debates surrounding the terms of the political and the distribution of properly political capacities (Elinoff, 2014, 2016, 2019). Through the country's cycle of coups and elections, deeply contested questions have emerged surrounding the arrangement of the political, the role and position of the sovereign, the location of the rule of exception, and the capacities of citizens (especially poor citizens) to participate in politics at all. The Thai struggle over democracy is thus not merely about institutional arrangements, but rather a more contentious question about the roles, spaces, and times of bodies and their ability to speak and be seen as legitimate political actors (i.e. Rancière, 1999). As Thais have mobilised around these conflicts they have raised questions surrounding the basis of political legitimacy that holds together the nation-state as a sovereign political sphere that is granted both the power to legitimise particular distributions of rights and the ability to suspend them in the state of exception (i.e. Schmitt, 1985; Agamben, 2005). Thus, the unanswered questions about democracy, sovereignty, and politics fundamental to the contemporary Thai polity not only highlight critiques of the Thai state in its current form, but also ask about its shape after the passing of the deified monarch, Rama IX.

As Postero and I (2019) argue, the political is an emergent and contingent phenomenon. It is something that is actively produced through unfinished practices of disagreement and disjunctive coalitions engaged in collective world-making processes (see also Elinoff 2019). The political, though abstract, is also material, composed of both practices and

things. In this chapter, I demonstrate how materiality offers a means for citizens engaging in this practice of world making at its broadest and most transcendent scale to make such practices real and tangible. I show how in Thailand 'things' have become an essential means for protesters to articulate competing visions of the political, grounding seemingly secular questions related to electoral democracy within the transcendent visions of the population. Through things – blood and concrete – competing actors mobilise distinct versions of the complex, obscure, and often contradictory forces that hold the political together as a contested, emerging sphere. By describing how citizens anchor these ineffable questions associated with the theological dimensions of the political in the physical world, I show how divergent semiotic histories enable them to articulate distinct visions of the political and different arrangements of political bodies therein. By mobilising things in particular ways, they present new versions of the political as they make complex, sometimes conflicting, readings of the existing connections at the heart of the polity. In doing so, they turn the immaterial stuff of the political into the material stuff of public debate. These practices of transfiguration show how materials fill the voided conceptual space at the heart of the political, transforming it into something tactile, actionable, and lived. In this sense, things channel and organise affective ties, linking heterogeneous histories, distiling contradictory debates, and producing complex affective responses. By materialising the political in physical forms, these protesters attempt to make the ineffable subject to both rearticulation and reorganisation.

I make this argument by examining two political demonstrations that took place at the gates of the Thai Government House – a blood ceremony performed by pro-democracy Red Shirt activists in 2010 and an effort to encase the gate in concrete by anti-democratic activists from the People's Democratic Reform Committee in 2014. Neither event was successful in bringing about the changes the protesters desired in the immediate term.[3] However, both were evocative for the ways in which materiality was used to raise deep political questions. Rather than provide an extended ethnographic analysis of these events, either describing the events as they took place or considering the range of intentions or meanings of the events to the various participants, I explore the historical and present-tense semiotic histories of the materials at the centre of the protests – blood and concrete – to consider the way protesters used these things to articulate distinct lines of force exerted to bind citizens with one another into a political community. As I show, these things arise as important vehicles of politics because of their abilities to contain contested meanings, materialise the very meanings, mataerialising forces that hold the political together in the first place.

My analysis follows Webb Keane (2005), Jane Bennett (2010), and others (Munn, 1986; Ferme, 2001; Engelke, 2005; Braun and Whatmore, 2010) who emphasise the complex ways the materials shape social life. Thinking about things in this way draws together a semiotic approach with a 'new materialist' take on 'things' as modestly agentive. Scholars like Keane (2005), and those who take up his Peircian reading of things (e.g. Fehérváry, 2013), emphasise the way things are not merely semiotic in the sense that they are inscribed with a clear and settled meaning, but rather that their thing-ness itself transmits histories and economies into lived reality.[4] In this sense, all signs and symbols, have important irreducible material qualities. What this means in a practical sense is that things compose or 'bundle' meanings together in complex ways. Indeed, interpretations of the history of things and the meanings they make present is a crucial site of political contestations (see Ferme, 2001). Thus, material work is always already enmeshed in symbolic practices. On the other hand, scholars like Bennett highlight how things themselves act asserting their own agency, producing politics in their own right. Such a reading speaks to the way the political is an aesthetic field, what Jacques Rancière (1999) describes as 'distribution of the sensible'. Here, what Bennett calls 'Thing-Power' evokes the limits of human capacities reflecting the ineffable character of political forces. Similarly, De Vries (2006) refers such god-like forces as the 'absolute' epistemological limits of human action (Bennett, 2010: 3). In this sense, exploring the ways materials are used to challenge, affix, or trouble the political, opens up space for encountering the uncertain forces that bind actors together, making transcendent forces immanent and enabling immannt claims through transcendent appeals. Such an approach reflects what Bolotta, Fountain, and Feener point out in their introduction: that although the language of political theology emerges from the Christian West, non-Christian contexts also produce, extend, or transform theological concepts in ways that reflect the complex interrelated trajectories endemic to their own specific settings.

Blood and concrete mobilise whole histories of the political in Thailand simultaneously reflecting Buddhist, Hindu, animist, as well as modernist, colonialist, and developmentalist discourses. Through these materials, Thai protesters bundled the complex and contradictory histories that compose the political and mobilised them to rearticulate their visions of the social order, to discuss principles of legitimacy, and to reformulate the forces that bind the political together. Blood carries with it ideas of sacrifice (Cohen, 2012), 'pre-modern' curses (Engle, 2016), and biomedical contagion (Viernes, 2015). For Thai protesters, it also reflects contested notions of kinship, horizontality, and human

commensuration central to democratic discourses of democratic citizenship. In the next sections, I will show that these alternative sensibilities surrounding the basis of citizenship and a common substance of political commensurability reveal how Red Shirt activists used blood to evoke both a shared biomaterial substrate of belonging and to make a claim to democracy more broadly. Concrete, on the other hand, evokes royal genealogies of modernisation (Chua, 2012), which bind transcendent visions of moral progress to economic growth (Johnson, 2014). In this way, the material binds local histories of development with international modernist discourse of developmentalism and the promise of modernity *tout court* (Forty, 2013). As I will demonstrate, concrete's material lineage in Thailand simultaneously reaffirms the modernist developmental *telos* and relocates it in the moral capacities of the wellborn, reasserting the pre-cast inequalities inherent in the hierarchical visions of renovation mobilised by the 'reformist', anti-democratic People's Democratic Reform Committee. I argue that the materials at the centre of these protests are important because of the way they made these distinct but related renderings of Thai political theology real, thus exposing contrasting arrangements of the political, highlighting distinct forces that hold the nation together, *and* indicating where those forces appear to be coming apart.

Blood

On 16 March 2010, Red Shirt protesters joined a queue stretching for 200 metres to donate their blood as in a mass demonstration of their desire to restore the country's suspended democracy. Demanding then-Prime Minister Abhisit Vejajjiva to call snap elections, the protesters sought to show the government their willingness to spill their own blood in the name of the nation and its democratic future. Their hopes rested on the fact that a new vote would almost certainly usher in another victory to a surrogate of the popular but controversial Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, who had been ousted in a military coup four years prior in 2006. The blood protest was part of the latest rounds of mobilisation by the Red Shirted protesters and the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD) to continue to push against the Democrat-headed government that had assumed power at the end of 2008 via a series of judicial decisions that resulted in the elected Thaksin-backed People's Power Party (PPP) being twice removed from office. Following these decisions, the Democrat government was able to gain power after a parliamentary coalition.

The donations netted roughly 300 litres of blood from approximately 70,000 participants. On 17 March the group gathered en masse at the government house to symbolically spill their own blood in the name of returning to democracy. The action was supposed to be a non-violent reflection of the group's aims and willingness to die for their cause. The blood, which had since been mixed with water, was poured in front of the government house, at Abhisit's personal residence, and near the home of the Privy Councilor, Prem Thinsolonanda in Nakhorn Ratchasima province (Cohen, 2012: 224).

The event thrust the Red Shirts into the media spotlight. Nearly every international news outlet covered the protest as much for the shock value as for the news itself. Images of viscous, red blood streaming down government buildings redirected global interest to the nation's seemingly endless political turmoil if only to redouble the perceptions of inscrutability that often plague Thai politics by tying the complex ideological histories underneath the protests to exoticised descriptions of blood curses and spirits. Inside the country the UDD and the doctors and nurses who facilitated the blood drive were criticised for their participation in an event that was seen as unhygienic and publicly embarrassing. Indeed, critics of the Red Shirts used these same discourses of hygiene, civility, and modernity to obscure and delegitimise the underlying claims of commensuration – claims to comparable likeness of political being – the protesters sought to make through blood. In short, through the spilling of their own blood Red Shirt protesters sought to demonstrate that they were like (*thaw thiam*) other wealthier Thais (see also Elinoff, 2019).[5]

While media reports emphasised the 'symbolic' nature of the protest, scholars analysed the event extensively, considering the broader resonances and efficacy of blood within the commingled ontological landscape of animist/Theravada Buddhist/Brahmanic beliefs endemic to much of Thailand. Erik Cohen (2012), for example, traces out multiple discourses and counter-discourses that grounded the event. While he argues that protesters themselves said they were making a 'sacrifice' for the nation, critics transformed the Red Shirt's discourses about purity and sacrifice into biomedical discourses about disease and contagion. Nevertheless, he points out that the event was novel, precisely because of the way it upset the prevailing 'regime of images' inserting incivility into the public eye in the name of shifting the prevailing political discourse. Noah Viernes follows a similar vein considering the way that the aesthetics of the Red Shirts' political performance raised 'a critical imagination that moves the terms of the *polis* above the prescriptions of state militancy' (2015: 23). The assertion of commonality via the blood protest intervened in the political at an aesthetic level by using bodily

substances to challenge the arrangement of the state. By staking claim to political visibility, Viernes argues that blood defined these new political actors, even in the face of the counter-politics that rescripted their claims to belonging as impure actions by germs and viruses. Finally, David Engle (2016) has argued that the protest reflected a hybrid legal sensibility that mobilises elements of *Lanna* (Northern Thai) notions of justice and recompense in order to confront the hegemony of the centralised state's claims to hegemony through modern law.

News reports of the event also highlight languages of sacrifice, non-violence, and super-natural potency. Some protesters in these reports highlight the way they had chosen to spill their own blood to demonstrate the injustice behind the power of the Abhisit regime.[6] For other protesters, the demonstration was inextricably linked to larger debates and tensions around citizenship and democracy in Thailand. Brief interviews highlight how these protests were seen as a means of forcing the Prime Minister to call snap elections and to restore electoral democracy in the process.[7] Indeed, as scholars have noted, Red Shirt activists invoked a range of rationalities in the wake of the event – pointing toward the ways in which they had spilled their own blood to demonstrate a non-violent commitment to democracy, arguing that blood was also an expression of collective spirit and will; and finally that the blood evoked a common biological substrate of not only the protesters, but the polity itself. Red Shirt leader Nattawut Saikua put it this way: 'The blood of the common people is mixing together to fight for democracy.'[8] Another, more radical leader, Arisman Pongruangrong went further: 'If Mr. Abhisit is home, I would like to know the colour of the blood in his head, whether or not it is red' (quoted in Cohen, 2012: 224). The use of blood was powerful precisely because as a medium it could carry this diverse and heterogeneous range of meanings.

Here the material qualities of blood take on a new significance, channelling these diverse meanings while nevertheless rearticulating the political claims of protesters in a coherent way. As anthropologist Janet Carsten notes: 'Blood has a unique combination of material properties that make it distinctive within and outside the body. Colour and liquidity are the most striking of these, but their co-occurrence and association in the body with heat, and the propensity of blood to clot, turning from liquid to solid, may be equally important to its capacity for symbolic elaboration' (2013: S6). Although the analyses I describe above pay close attention to blood's political resonances, they often downplay the material qualities of blood – red-ness, stickiness, and hybridity – so as to initiate broader discussions of divergent semiotic references to ancient modes of law, supernatural belief, and bio-medical discourses about viral

politics. Yet, I argue that the materiality of blood itself combines these readings, allowing different interpretations to remain together despite being unsettled. In doing so, blood raises a far bigger question about the uncertain heart of the political.

For the Red Shirt protesters, blood's red-ness spoke to political claims for justice based on commensurate humanness; its commingling troubled notions of distinct royal bloodlines offering an alternative rendering of the political, made up of the commensurate fraternal relations central to the democratic order. Blood's purity highlighted the power of sacrifice. Its capacity to become a vector of disease demonstrated the protester's viral incursion into national narratives and their claims to urban space. The protesters' voluntary donation highlighted the ambiguous relation between violence and political transformation. In short it was the bloodiness of blood – red, coagulating, sticky, cellular, bodily, pure, infectious, common, exceptional, violent, and ordinary – that imbued the protest with its power to elevate conversation beyond the gory spectacle into an area of deeply contested political questions. In this sense, the Red Shirt usage of blood allowed the protesters to highlight much broader questions about both the specific arrangement of the Thai polity that they sought to contest (that it considers commensurate humans unequal via their birth) and to suggest an alternative to the conceptually voided space at the foundation of the political that their protest exposed (a polity founded in the equal relations among such commensurate humans). As Carsten points out, the material properties of blood are fundamental to its symbolic elaboration in Medieval Christian theologies and modern Catholic ones. In those renderings blood binds together body and soul, is the sacred and exceptional sign of Christ's sacrifice, or can become a sign of crisis, as in bodies gushing blood (2013: S8). Red Shirt leaders evoked a notion of sacrifice as well, here, in two forms: First, the voluntary donation of blood to the broader cause of the protest. Second, in the non-violent spilling of blood in the name of democracy. In giving of their own bodily substance Red Shirt leaders suggested they were highlighting the underlying moral structure of their political claims. As Didier Fassin notes, sacrifice is critical to the redefinition of the moral terms of political struggle (2007: 511). In this way, the sacrifice of donating one's own blood helped to resituate protesters' claims of commensuration on moral grounds while also refounding the political community upon such terms.

Yet, in the Thai Buddhist/animist religious complex, blood sacrifice carries with it different powers that are not always rendered in terms of morality and certainly not biological commensuration. Blood, especially menstrual blood, is seen as a powerful substance with important supernatural qualities (Terwiel, 1976: 389). Many commentators noted the

supernatural quality of the protest, highlighting the roles of the Brahmin priests, the supernatural potency of blood, and the metaphysical urgency of the clean-up (i.e. Cohen, 2012: 231; Engle, 2016: 74).[9] This interpretation echoes Peter Jackson's (2016) recent analysis of the broadening of supernatural practices in previously secular spaces in Thailand and more long-time observations about the role of the supernatural in Thai politics (see also Tambiah, 1984; Klima, 2002; McDaniel, 2011). As Engle points out, the donation of blood also reflects the ambiguities of the surrounding power of curses and their uses as efficacious agents of political change; whether by supernatural energy or moral force blood becomes a material means of effecting actual political transformation.

There is another context in which blood matters within this political contest related to the unwinding of the relationship between monarchy, territory, kinship, and the body politic. As Baker and Phongpaichit describe, King Vajiravudh's absolutist theory of the state was one rendered via the body.

> He theorised that humans who came together in society chose a king to overcome their mutual disagreements. From that point forward the power of the king was absolute and unchallengeable. Succession continued in one lineage for stability. A state was like a body in which all parts had a certain role. The king was the brain. The other parts should not question the orders of the brain but obey them. (Baker and Phongpaichit, 2005: 106)

Baker and Phongpaichit continue, arguing that under Vajiravudh 'nationalism and royalism were identical' expressed in the national flag: '[B]lue, white, and red not only matched the colours used in flags of other allies, but also represented elements of his national trinity: white for Buddhism, blue for the monarch, red for the blood Thai people should be prepared to sacrifice in defence of the nation' (Baker and Phongpaichit, 2005: 107). Transposing British political theologies of 'God, Queen, and Country', the Thai nation was itself forged as a kind of project to render blood political in very specific ways. The flag, like the 'geo-body' of the nation (Winichakul, 1994), draws the blood of the nation and the people together into a body politic in a specific relation with the monarch.[10]

Preceding the renaissance of Thai nationalism under Vajiravudh, there was something of a technical revolution in the making of 'Thai blood' out of the polyglot of ethnicities that occupied the Siamese kingdom. As Streckfuss describes, the history of the census in Thailand is marked by a turn-of-the-century 'conjuring trick' in which the country's Tai-language-speaking populations disappeared in the census only to return later as

'Thai nationals and members of the Thai race' (2012: 306). The near simultaneity of the technical transformation produced by the census and the ideological shift enacted by emerging forms of nationalism reveals the way the blood from subjects previously considered to be of distinct national backgrounds became ideologically fused in this process of forging Thai nationalism.[11]

There is another strand of the blood question that relates to the differentiation of blood between royal blood and other blood. As Mary Hass describes, royal personage (*chao nai*) refers to a status determined solely by blood (1951: 586). She points out that although one could be granted royal ranks (*chao nang*) for public service or nobility via separate set of royal titles, succession and royal lineage itself was rooted in blood relation. The importance of kinship – bloodlines – as a means of distributing inequality was fundamental to the People's Power Party's reassessment of the inequalities of the feudal system that it used to justify the overthrow of the absolute monarchy. Equal rights based on citizenship offered a counterargument to the ways in which the privileges of 'royal blood' animated the feudal system (Baker and Phongpaichit, 2005: 119). The People's Party's statement is thus a strong indictment of the hierarchies of birth inherent in the old order. Throughout the authors critique distorted ways in which those with 'royal blood' subjugate commoners (*phrai*) and are elevated to have 'special rights more than the people' (Banomyong, 2001: 70).

It is notable that the word *phrai* was re-appropriated by the Red Shirts in 2010 as a mobilising point to articulate their claim that Thai society had been plagued by persistent 'double standards' – especially with regards to the ways in which (1) their votes were counted in relation to the rest of the electorate; (2) their political mobilisation was prosecuted in the court system; (3) the persistent uses of exception to unseat their electoral choices; and, (4) probably most profoundly for many participants in the movement, the ways in which persistent forms of inequality continue to shape public perceptions of the political capacities of poor citizens. This critique and the use of *phrai* was contrasted with a widespread usage of historical references to universal citizenship articulated through references to the French Revolution, *La Marseillaise* and the credo of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity (Elinoff, 2012; Tausig, 2013). Such evocations of citizenship reflect a different register of political blood, the consanguinity of universal membership.[12] The blood protest worked alongside and through these critiques as it was premised on enacting the protester's bodily commensuration with one another and with the elites with whom they saw themselves in conflict.

What I want to emphasise is not any specific or widespread republican aspiration among the protesters – this idea, like many others, was subject to an extremely diverse range of opinions – but rather the way the theological character blood made it a potent vehicle for making these complex claims in the first place. Blood, either as a symbol of commensuration or difference, relies on a deeper uncertainty about the forces that draw citizens into relation with one another and in what orders. Debates surrounding blood, kinship, democracy, and the nation thus evoke more fundamental tensions surrounding the political forces that nations together in political relations. If blood was used to define royal lineage, the spilling of common blood as an act of protest and non-violence works by making visible the biological commensuration of all blood. The quote above about 'knowing the colour of the blood inside Abhisit's head' raises this question in a more potent way, highlighting this commensuration between the leader of the country and those who seek to reaffirm the principles of equal birth embedded in their visions of democracy.

Concrete

On 18 February 2014, just one month shy of the four-year anniversary of the blood protest, Suthep Thungsuban rallied supporters of his People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC) to the Government House gates. He gathered them there to block Yingluck Shinawatra's efforts to reopen the facility, which they had occupied for five weeks.[13] In their effort to obstruct the government, members of the PDRC used sandbags, precast concrete barricades, and wet cement to seal off the gate and prevent the Yingluck's government from reclaiming the grounds. They argued that the action was a 'symbolic gesture' to show that the Government House was closed.[14]

As a piece of political theatre, the event received far less coverage than the blood curse. It disappeared from the news just days after it happened. Rather than see it as a performative political ritual laden with symbolic significance, the protest was understood as a self-evident utilitarian stunt. Indeed, even the participants themselves has far less to say about the wet cement they poured on the gate. Cement, in fact, seems sort of epiphenomenal to the actual work the material was supposed to be doing, sealing off the gates in some final and ultimate way. The protesters made little ceremony of the material's use. It was not fetishised or chanted over. Little care was taken with its mixing or application. Videos of the protest show how ready-made cement was hastily spread over sandbags with whatever kinds of supplies the protesters had available to them at the time. One

clip shows an empty water bottle being used to spread wet cement across the sandbags. So, instead of the kind of super sophisticated symbolic repertoire evoked by the blood protest, Suthep and his followers used the cement at its most cementitious, hastily mixing and dumping it on the gate to permanently exile Yingluck's government.

If blood is laden with significance, readily available to symbolic reading, cement and concrete are often seen as mute. Cement is typically excluded from most discussions of the political in Thailand, save for debates against specific applications of the material in the form of development projects.[15] Indeed, unlike the blood protests, the PDRC's action seems relatively lost to history, just one of a number of stunts, each one hyperbolically framed by the PDRC at the time as the 'Final Battle' to 'Shutdown down Bangkok to Restart Thailand' once and for all. There was global media coverage of the action, but significantly less ink was spilled interpreting the cement protest than the blood protest. No scholars of Thailand have noted its significance and there have been no sustained analyses of the political performance. Years on the event seems to have been confined to the dustbin of history. It is not even a footnote as the PDRC pushed the country toward the eventual military coup which occurred in May 2014. It is possible that the protest's failure to either completely stop the Yingluck government or its failure to generate significant momentum for the PDRC in the moment, marked it as white noise in a year that now feels like an inevitable march toward the 2014 military coup.

The obscurity of the event also reflects cement's material self-evidence. The material's mundane, everyday qualities – its greyness, ubiquity, and association with surfaces – marked the action as a kind of straightforward sort of politics that lacked any symbolic reference to larger theological frameworks. By cementing the gates, the PDRC was apparently trying to seal them off. The application of cement, in this sense, was a straightforward, 1:1, political performance in which the appropriate material (cement) was applied to an appropriate task (permanent closure) without apparent surplus semiotic importance. In this way, it is very unlike blood, which required reams of interpretation and context to make sense of; cement's meaning is clear at first glance. Yet, a political economy of Thai cement reveals the ways in which cement has been central to two concurrent, deeply political twentieth-century projects: modernisation and monarchical revival.

The founding of the Siam Cement Company (Later Siam Cement Group [SCG]) occurred in 1913 under the auspices of a joint arrangement between the Thai monarchy and Danish experts and investors. The company was founded to create a domestic supply of a material that had been previously scarce and which the monarchy saw as fundamental to multiple

modernising projects. Over the course of the twentieth century, especially the latter half, the cement industry expanded alongside Thailand's building boom. Nevertheless, SCG became the third largest company in Thailand. Although its material interests now extend well beyond cement, the company maintains a central role in the nation's psyche and holds a critical space in the Crown Properties Bureau (CPB), the royal purse, which maintains a 30 per cent stake in the company (Porphant, 2015). Although SCG remains staunch in its apolitical stance, the company's founding marked a critical juncture in Thailand's turn toward modernisation and remains a hugely important industrial conglomerate in the nation's larger economic portfolio.

Beyond these political economic implications, cement was fundamental to the articulation of Thai nationalist architecture (Chua, 2012). Moreover, infrastructural projects were essential to the monarchy's revival over the course of the twentieth century. Images of the late King Bhumipol Adulyadej as the 'Development King' surveying his realm or looking over blueprints for large dam projects continue to circulate widely. In the wake of the monarch's passing, these images have been circulating globally solidifying tropes of the monarch's self-sacrifice and concern for his people. The monarch and the rest of the royal family are so closely associated with infrastructure that many of the country's dams, roads, and bridges are named after them.[16]

The history of these development projects intersects in important ways with the expansion of military rule throughout the 1950s and 1960s. As Thailand found itself in the center of the Cold War, it drew on American development funds for the construction of roads and highways to open up its dissident regions on the Lao/Cambodian borderlands. Such purchases cemented international relations – as in the American built 'Friendship Highway' – and domestic relations facilitating closer engagements with the hinterlands. Indeed, during this period, American investment in Thailand accounted for nearly 500,000 tons of cement purchased from the Siam Cement per year (Bangkok Post, 2009: 144). From this period until the oil shocks of 1970s, SCG grew rapidly. Following the disruptions of the late 1970s, the company continued to expand alongside others in the industry as the Thai economy boomed. The massive construction and real estate bubble growing underneath the country fuelled an expansion in the company even as the construction sector began to accommodate more suppliers. During the boom times, SCG controlled 70–75 per cent of the local market share (Wirat, 2000: 267). The shock of the 1997 market crash posed serious challenges for SCG, but ultimately through corporate restructuring the company ultimately survived and expanded its reach and the CPB in the process.

Beyond the economic implications of this growth, the development project was fundamental to the reestablishment of the monarchy after the Second World War. In this sense, the monarchy underwent a deliberate shift from blood to concrete in its effort to reconfigure its claims to legitimacy and royal rule. As Paul Handley describes, the aftermath of the fall of absolutism required a new theorisation of the value of the monarchy. Thai Prince Dhani Nivas offered a theoretical basis for the continued necessity for a monarchy alongside the turn toward constitutionalism. As Handley puts it: 'Conscious of the challenge of modern science, Dhani avoided the mystical issue of royal blood and dynasty. Royal sagaciousness was a given…When natural laws failed, royal wisdom found a way' (2006: 85). Modernisation offered a critical means to build royal charisma (*barami*) via the extension of development.

Christine Gray's (1986, 1992) study of the revival of the monarchy demonstrates the way this period of monarchical revival entailed the production of new sorts of social relations embedded in ritual cycles that produced new sorts of relationships with a corporate elite and brought the monarchy to power. It succeeded in actualising Prince Dhani's new theory of royal power and transformed the relationship between the monarchy and the market by linking 'Buddhist renunciation with the goals of anticommunism, and national development' (1986: 450). As she describes: 'Beginning in the late 1960s, the activities of the king and members of the royal family drew U.S. and World Bank-sponsored development project into the ritual cycle. Once these projects were identified with the *barami* of the Righteous Ruler, they became "natural" events, *thammachat,* phenomenon arising from *dhamma*' (1986: 703).

As Gray demonstrates, the history of modernisation in Thailand is also a history of the revival of monarchical power via the extension of ritual ties that linked capitalism, royal power, and Buddhism. King Bhumipol's expeditions to the countryside were undertaken in an effort to reach the people, survey his land, plan and engage in development projects. They were also occasions for *kathin* ceremonies – in which lay people offer monks robes and gifts before the Lenten retreat – which created space for direct encounters between the public the 'righteous ruler' (*dhammaraja*) who could see the 'the truth of men's suffering' (1992: 452). These were potent encounters with power without mediation that accompanied the expansion of Thai authority via the militarised development initiative (Chaloemtirana, 2007).

In this telling, royal power was solidified as moral *barami* (charisma) achieved through movements throughout the country and ritual practice that generated social loyalties and produced a kind of morality of care for the population exerted through development. As Gray traces out in close

detail, the ritual movements of Rama IX helped channel *barami* and financial capital in specific directions, while intersecting with national politics at specific moments. The results of the complex project were the revival of the monarchy and its royal charisma and a restoration of linguistic hierarchies that affirmed the moral hierarchies of Theravada Buddhism (Gray, 1992: 457). This restoration had important effects on how democracy and politics were understood. With the older hierarchies of truth and virtue in place, demands of democracy from below are understood as cries from corrupted voices of lower beings not yet capable of hearing the truth. Popular outbursts thus became re-scripted as signs of moral corruption which demanded purification of the body politic by suspensions of law and coups (Streckfuss, 2011).[17] Concurrent with this history, Handley notes that the political economy of building became invisible as most of the royal purse was wrapped up in 'faceless' businesses like Siam Cement (2006: 175; see also Ünaldi, 2016).

Of course, none of this history was rhetorically martialled at the PDRC's 2014 protest. Siam Cement *was not* connected in any meaningful way to the political movement. The only indicators of this history were the discarded bags of SCG's 'Elephant Brand Cement' littered about the protest site and the clotted wet cement crudely applied to sandbags stacked in front of the Government House gate. To be clear, I am *not* suggesting that SCG played any role in supplying the cement for the protest or had any role in the event at all in fact. Instead, I am pointing out the work the material was doing in making the political real by filling the empty gap at the heart of politics. The materiality of cement simultaneously mobilised this history and paved it over. Cement, in this reading, binds together this older history with the hierarchies of national developmentalism, which lie just below the smooth surface of moral reform made visible for the public to see.

It is the raw and utilitarian aspects of the cement that make this history invisible, but also politically effective. The faceless ubiquity of cement and concrete mark them as unexceptional materials, but, like blood, cement's histories and its re-mobilisation helped ground the protesters moral claims to blocking the government and demanding reform. The same reasons that dams and roads are seen as markers of modern development and not as specifically political technologies enabled cement's mobilisation as utilitarian or merely functional; the meaning of cement here appears obvious. Yet, cement should be read via the same semiotics that made blood the subject of intense debate in mid-2010. The PDRC's resurgent royalism and conservative nationalism drew from the symbolic well of the monarchy to make its claims moral power and authority. Their consistent refrain of 'reform' sought to relocate sovereignty from the votes

of citizens to the cloistered rule of 'good people' articulated with these deeper histories of cement and monarchy. The material thus sought to bond the morality to rule, the power to develop, the ability to distribute capital, and the national hierarchy, cementing it in place once and for all.

Materialising the political

By examining materials like these as political, I aim to provoke a broader discussion of the ways in the seemingly immaterial, transcendent emptiness of the political authority gets filled and made real. As Carl Schmitt argues, the secular state shares critical historical and symbolic grounds with theological authority (Schmitt, 1985: 36). Such a claim gives weight to a deeper engagement with the transcendent qualities of political authority but does not necessarily help us understand how such a thing is made real in the world or opened as a subject of contestations. The mobilisation of things and their divergent semiotic material qualities offers one path toward making sense of this question.

In the Thai case, these two political performances used distinct materials to evoke distinct effects. In the case of the Red Shirts' blood protest, the conflicting discursive renderings of blood as in both feudal and democratic moments highlighted contrasting arrangements of the political. Their performance used blood to raise the question of commensuration between themselves and the ruling classes. Although protesters did not go so far as to publicly challenge the ways in which royal lineages intersect with the construction of the nation's political terrain, they did highlight both their common biological substrate with those in power and their willingness to sacrifice themselves on behalf of the nation to restore the democratic order. In doing so, they highlighted the irreducible violence at the heart of the political order and began developing what became a deeper argument about the ways powerful elites had manipulated democracy to re-inscribe their bodies in subordinate positions as *phrai*. As Noah Viernes puts it, 'blood became a means to highlight the violence of exclusion within the circulatory veins of the political' (2015: 8).

Cement, though less loaded with overt symbolism should be regarded similarly. The PDRC's efforts to cement the gates of the Government House should be read as equally charged with meaning, even though the material itself appears straightforward. Cement stands in stark contrast with blood precisely because it does not seem to evoke the same kinds of loaded questions about how the political is organised. Yet, if we can follow Webb Keane (and his Peircian approach), then we must accept that cement in Thailand is always a politically loaded material. Indeed,

on more than one occasion when I explain my current research into the material's histories and environmental presents, and contested futures, my Thai friends have laughed sheepishly, saying, 'cement is a big story here' (*phuncement khue ruang yai maak*). The material's history is self-evident, but unspoken. Thus, whether or not the PDRC intended to raise this genealogy, the action and its context did this work for them. Drawing these two cases together, then, demonstrates the ways in which each material made present distinct contested questions about the 'theological' arrangement of the political and so too different starting points for the question of legitimacy and sovereignty. While blood pointed to notions of universal personhood and electoral democracy as the source of political legitimacy and sovereignty, concrete evoked notions of development kingship and pastoral, moral governance.

The question of what it is we mean when we say 'the political' is actually incredibly difficult to articulate with any specificity. The political often overlaps with, but is not merely reducible to the nation, the institutions of the state, notions of social hierarchy, the social sphere of disagreement. Furthermore, it evokes questions about citizenship, law, and sovereignty but is, again, not the same as those things. What political theologists point out is that the political is a kind of voided conceptual space that organises and links these other spheres but does not replicate any one instead giving shape to a sphere of agonism (i.e. Schmitt, 1996 [1932]). So, given the theoretical difficulty of articulating the political as a distinct conceptual sphere, why would we expect a clear articulation of such a thing from protest groups, whose claims are deeply related to the organisation of the political at various levels, but are nevertheless targeted somewhere else entirely?

Webb Keane has argued that materials play a critical role in the production of religious authority precisely because of their ability to bear symbolic weight, make encounters with the sacred present, and to transform over time. 'It is in that materiality that they [religions] are part of experience and provoke response, that they have public lives and enter into ongoing chains of cause and consequence' (Keane, 2008: S124). Theories of political theology ask us not only to consider the metaphysical side of politics, but also push us to consider the ways in which the metaphysical is made physical. If, as Schmitt (1996 [1932]) argues, the political is the domain that distinguishes friend from enemy, such a distinction requires articulations of itself to be made available to the senses, to be lived, breathed and felt. As a number of the authors associated with debates related to political theology note, religious categories emerge because the origins of the political refer to indeterminate questions, unconscious domains, many not amenable to logic, reasoning, or rational

apprehension. The idea of transcendence fills that void. The 'extraordinary' (Wydra, 2015), 'empty signifiers', (Mouffe, 2006), the 'absolute' (De Vries, 2006) or 'imminence' (Lefort, 2006) are all ideas that reflect the political and its deeper mysteries. Each of these theological categories suggests an affective fullness, but physical emptiness that nevertheless effectively suture actors to one another in specifically political relations – terrains of agonism composed of fellow citizens, terrorists, resistant subjects, 'irrational' protesters, 'good' citizens, the people, friends, enemies, and other forms of unrecognised, unrecognisable adversaries.

What these material protests do then is to articulate a set of unsettled questions, histories, and claims to the political that can be felt, touched, seen, smelled, and applied to other things in the world. As Bennett points out, the vibrant capacities of things to act in their limited ways in spite of, around, and beyond human intentions raises the spectre of a political powers beyond the human world. Materials, here, serve as both metaphors – offering means to articulate the complexity of the political with things that might stand in its stead – and also as actual physical instantiations of the histories, symbols, and political arrangements these actors seek to expose, transform, or restore in their movements. In the Thai case, cement and blood do just this – they make possible particular articulations of the political without necessarily articulating it themselves. These materials fill the vacant space with something tangible in order to reconfigure the transcendent grounding of the political itself.

These material protests demonstrate that the forging of the political in seemingly secular institutions like law or the state is inevitably related to a broader metaphysical question of what binds people in the first place. Cement and blood are both binders. Cement binds one thing to another making the making of modernisation possible. Blood binds blood to itself, coagulating bodies into one mass. These gathered semi-liquid, semi-solid masses, their distributions, and their discontents are at the heart of Thailand's contemporary political uncertainty. The vast differences in the renderings of the Red Shirts and the PDRC reveal both the gaps between disparate theological conceptualisations of the political and also suggest the new sorts of transcendent thinking that might be applied to bind the nation together once again.

Coda: history recast

On 8 April 2017, just six months after the passing of King Bhumipol, Thais awoke to the news that a small plaque commemorating the 1932 overthrow of the absolute monarchy by the People's Party was missing from

the plaza of Anata Samakhom Throne Hall. While the previous plaque was a reminder of the history of constitutionalism and the emergence of a new kind of polity, the new plaque was engraved with the words: 'It is good to worship the Buddhist trinity, the state, one's own family, and to be faithful to one's monarch and allow oneself to be the engine that brings prosperity to the state.'[18] The plaque's newness was brought into relief by the bright grey square of fresh concrete surrounding it. Critics and activists spoke out against the removal, calling it an attempt to alter history by erasing previous visions of a democratic Thailand. Further investigations of the plaque's removal have been thwarted and speaking about it in public is taboo. These prohibitions on mentioning the plaque only serve to highlight the history behind it. Perhaps on a long enough timeline, the newness of the concrete surrounding the plaque will merge with the older material adjacent to it. As it does, maybe the older plaque will be forgotten altogether. Such is the power of cement as it alters the physical terrain of the present, seemingly erasing the past by telling it new again. And yet, although cement seems to reorganise the political, once it is given time to set, this broader mission is not merely topographic, but also bodily. In this it not only involves the recasting of space and time, but also the reorganisation of blood itself.[19]

6

The theopolitics of art: Qur'anic objects and their publics in Indonesia

Kenneth M. George

An illuminated manuscript and an embroidered bustier. The stories I want to tell about these two objects – and the troubles that befell them – are meant to throw some light on the theopolitics of art and culture in Indonesia.[1] Both of these objects were 'artfully made' and inscribed with Qur'anic verse. When put on public display, the manuscript and bustier drew anxious and agitated response from certain religious authorities, and the artists 'behind' the objects faced admonishment and rebuke for their handling of God's revelation. What may have disturbed the authorities was the propriety of turning revelation into art – turning one thing into another, and thus disclosing the vulnerability of the Qur'an as it is brought into material and worldly expression. Perhaps then, we need to ask, 'When is the Qur'an?' And when does it become a public concern? What is it about materiality that might render the Qur'an not the Qur'an? Does the sensuousness associated with art threaten the Qur'anic message with respect to its putative timelessness and rationality? These are but a few of the questions we might raise when exploring the theopolitics of art within national public spheres (here, the Indonesian public sphere), within the transnational 'living space of Islam' (*dar al-Islam*), and within globalised circuits of culture.

On object-oriented public spheres

My stories about the manuscript and the bustier aim to offer a glimpse of some of the recent ethicopolitical struggles over what is or is not Islamically significant in the field of public visual and material culture. Contemporary visual culture is not a settled matter within *dar al-Islam*, but a field of intense debate, pluralism, experiment, and striving. As

Barry Flood has made so clear, there is no 'timeless theology of images' in Islamic thought (2002: 651). And as I have written elsewhere: 'We would do well to refrain from drawing rigid territorial or ideological borders around visual cultures in Muslim communities and networks, presuming that they are blinkered by an unchanging and thoroughgoing homogeneity, or mistaking 'Islamic art' as their only aesthetic venture' (George, 2009: 591).[2] Commentaries about anxieties and reprisals over offensive images have dominated much discussion on Islam, art, and visual culture. The controversies surrounding the publication of cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* (in 2005) and in the French satirical weekly, *Charlie Hebdo* (in 2006, 2011, and 2015), are prominent cases, and usually find framing with discussions about blasphemy and freedom of expression.[3] Saba Mahmood in her discussion of the Danish cartoon scandal (2009) helpfully points out that these terms and principles – blasphemy and freedom of expression – circumscribe such controversies in a way that obscures not just the problem of moral injury, but what she calls 'attachment and cohabitation' between religious subjects and material objects of exemplarity and veneration. Things matter, not just principles.

So, I tell the stories, too, then, with the wish to coax discussion about political theology into considering the political and religious dilemmas of living in a world suffused with things (and not just image-things). Look around and see the profusion of things that preoccupy us as 'matters of concern:' forests, oceans, glaciers, and stones; commodities, infrastructures, property, and waste; money, weapons, libraries, and art; bodies, keyboards, clothes, tools, and food; DNA, antibiotics, metadata, and drones; the tables and desks on which we write; the floor and packed earth beneath our feet. Hannah Arendt had a keen sense of the world of things around us. For her, the 'public realm' signifies a world worked and transformed by human hands and the affairs that concern those who inhabit the man-made world together. 'To live together in the world', wrote Arendt, 'means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time' (1958: 52). Sustaining this public realm, 'this community of things', and saving it from 'the natural ruin of time' is for Arendt a key political aspiration and requirement for human life (1958: 55).

Arendt would write that the public realm 'gathers us together'. One way to think of this gathering is to follow Miguel Tamen, who describes such gatherings as 'friends of interpretable objects', that is, people who 'gather around various bits and pieces of the same world, attributing to them intentions, dispositions, and even languages' and 'who, accordingly, deal

with certain objects in recognisable ways' (2001: 1, 3).[4] Belonging, in this community, implies receptivity to the summons of objects, and knowing how and when objects answer back, or 'sort of' answer back, to our efforts to commune and communicate with them.[5] A somewhat different way of looking at a public realm would be to follow Martin Heidegger (1971) in attributing to things themselves the capacity to 'gather' people, gods, and other things around them, and to disclose 'being-in-the-world'. In this approach, object-oriented assemblies and socialities would support, animate, or enclose a communal politics. Political philosopher Jane Bennett (2010), for example, has written about 'thing-power' – the capacity of nonhuman materials to assert their vitality, recalcitrance, and agency in public life.[6] Ethics and politics, in this formulation, begin with the capacity to recognise nonhuman vitality and resistance in our material encounter with the world, especially through our touch points with aggregates and congregations of things (Bennett, 2010: 14–19). Seeking a theory of ethicopolitical 'action and responsibility that crosses the human-nonhuman divide', (2010: 24), Bennett calls attention to the heterogeneous assemblages in which we are bound to things, and in which she finds 'distributive agency' (2010: 21): electrical grids, trash, food, metal, biomedicine, and more.[7] These assemblages make up the ecosystemic field within which contingent and problem-discerning publics come and go.

Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (2005) have recently tried to display the possibilities for object-oriented political assembly in their book and exhibition, *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*. In his call for *dingpolitik*, Latour evokes the archaic Nordic and Saxon meaning of 'thing' as a gathering or assembly, and plays it off against current denotations that point to material objects. He writes:

> We don't assemble because we agree, look alike, feel good, are socially compatible or wish to fuse together but because we are brought by divisive matters of concern to some neutral, isolated place in order to come to some sort of provisional (dis)agreement. If the [Thing] designates both those who assemble because they are concerned as well as what causes their concerns and divisions, it should become the center of our attention: *Back to Things!* (Latour, 2005a: 23)[8]

The public realm that Latour conjures is marked by debate, and in this respect, it is similar to the one described by Jürgen Habermas in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989). In contrast to the Habermasian public sphere, however, Latour's is held together by things, 'objects – taken as so many issues – [that] bind all of us in ways that map out a public space profoundly different from what is usually recognised under

the label of the "political"' (2005a: 15). His *res publica*, his body politic, his commonwealth, is crowded with things. To engage with that public realm, with what he calls the 'Parliament of Things' (Latour, 1993: 142–5), requires political philosophy to deepen and sustain its regard for material concerns and circumstances, no less than for principles, values, reason, and procedures of legitimisation.[9]

The interest of Arendt, Tamen, Bennett, and Latour in formulating public realms around material culture dovetails well with the 'material turn' in anthropology, literary studies, and cultural studies over the past twenty years.[10] Religious studies, too, has experienced a 'material turn'.[11] This turn has taken scholars in the field beyond sacred narratives, theological ideas, and religious doctrines, beyond discursive reason, and beyond religious institutions and teachings to the fundamental presence and use of things in lived religion, and in the sensibilities and practices subtending religious subjects, religious publics, and religious ways of life. Religiosity and belief, in the view of object-oriented religious studies, arise out of dwelling in the material world. David Morgan puts it this way:

> Most believers live their religion in the grit and strain of felt-life that embodies their relation to the divine as well as to one another. The transcendent does not come to them as pure light or as sublime sensations in most cases, but in the odor of musty shrines or moldering robes or the pantry where they pray. (Morgan, 2010a: 8)

Religiosity thus rests in a scaffold of things, things upon which we act and which reciprocally act upon us. Often missing from religious material studies, nonetheless, is a sense in which religiously salient objects find purposeful deployment, or exert their agency in the political space of the public sphere.[12] Far greater emphasis is placed on the role of things in subjective, religion-inflected life-worlds, or in shaping religious culture. It is as if there is a refusal, a closing of the senses, to the *political* agency and impact of religiously salient things, a prospect that has to be entertained by an object-oriented study of political theology.

Part of the difficulty may be that scholars sometimes too strictly oppose the 'public' and the 'private' – a distinction common not just to social analysis but to political theology as well. Theorisations within modernist, liberal democratic political philosophy often view religion through the lens of Abrahamic traditions with their emphasis on the sincerity, intent, and individuality of the 'believing subject'. They thus relegate religion to a 'private' sphere of feeling and self-creation, and so deem religious discourse as a language ill-suited to the processes of justice and democratic deliberation.[13] A further impulse to do so, I think, is in part attributable to

anxiety about how to contain narrow religious politics and enthusiasms in citizenries or collectives of a plural character.[14] There is fear that a mob of tightly knit and fervently held private truths might overwhelm or subvert the deliberations of calm gatherings engaged in public reason. And, too, there may be apprehensiveness about relying upon dissensus and alterity, rather than upon a harmonious commonality – no matter how tenuous – as a basis for public ethicopolitical life.[15] Reconciling the public and the private is a central problem in political theology, especially as religious sentiments and arguments show persistent social resilience in the contemporary national and global order, and frequently demand address within and across public realms.[16]

Liberal ironists like the late Richard Rorty seek no theoretical resolution to the difficulties. Anti-foundationalist in outlook, and untroubled by the contingency of strongly held commitments, beliefs, and desires, Rorty (1989) seemed to be comfortable with the moral dilemmas of the public-private divide, and confident that they may be surmounted in the work of the imagination. Anthropologist Naveeda Khan – working in the context of Pakistan, where Islam is the state religion and the constitution constrains the free exercise of other faiths – takes a step toward closing the gap between public and private by showing a congenial resonance between them. Participating in public debates and religious argument over the construction and maintenance of neighborhood mosques, she finds, contributes to projects of self-creation. The aspirations and disappointments of Muslim citizens in their individual pursuit of perfectibility find expression in public debate and argumentation – here, over one of the very material objects that assures the Muslim faithful of their connection to God, a mosque (Khan, 2012). Yet another way of reconciling public and private spheres is to follow Susan Gal (2002) in treating the public-private distinction as a profoundly ideological and indexical communicative phenomenon that shapes the routines of everyday life and the contours of governance, institutions, and the common good. She writes that, 'Public and private do not simply describe the social world in any direct way; they are rather tools for arguments about and in that world' (Gal, 2002: 79). They are terms that are relational, and play a part in organising *both* discursive *and* material domains. Gal's analysis of the public-private distinction as a communicative phenomenon makes possible a supple and discerning appraisal of how danger and promise, hope and fear, attachment and revulsion, plurality and singularity, or justice and cruelty may be worked out, not just in everyday discourse but also in the materiality suffusing everyday life.

Approaching political theology with materialist sensibilities and a good 'grasp of things' can help us render further clear the entanglement of

political and religious life, including the ways notions of the transcendent come to shape various fields of political thought and action. An approach of this kind would not do away with the human, but would admit and recognise things and processes of objectification as crucial elements in the constitution of the public realm, its politics, and its social reproduction (cf., Tilley, 2006). It also would call attention to ways material things play a part in collective or self-defining exercises involving striving, skepticism, imagination, conscience, belonging, accountability, and control (George, 2010, 2012b). Questions of justice, authority, autonomy, power, and representation may of course be addressed within the terms or vocabularies of ideology, principle, and debate. Yet there is real advantage in framing those questions around the desires, sensibilities, and affects that attach to objects. This means taking seriously what David Morgan (2010b: 72) calls 'the poetics of things' – 'their capacity to act upon us, to assert agency, to make rather than to only to be made.' An object-oriented political theology returns us to an early, everyday sense of theory (Greek, *theoria*) as 'a looking at things' – with the understanding that things may look back.[17] It declares, 'No politics without things', and equally, 'No ethics without things' (George, 2015).

Qur'anic objects and their publics

Let me return, then, to the manuscript and the bustier – the two 'Qur'anic' objects that I so briefly mentioned at the outset of this chapter. Both became matters of public concern in Indonesia: they summoned publics to them and put public energies into motion. A cultural politics of belonging surrounded each of them, pivoting especially on the veneration and custodial care Muslims are expected to show toward the Qur'an and its language (George, 2009; Haeri, 2003). When displayed, both objects beckoned or addressed 'gatherings' to whom the things and their makers were accountable. The Indonesian nation-state was part of the political backdrop to the objects' creation and display, but wider global communities came into the picture, too. I use these two Qur'anic 'things' to suggest some of the ways in which the state and its citizen subjects might imagine and objectify religion, politics, and culture within the public sphere. In doing so, I will take a page from Mahmood (2009) to show how 'attachment and cohabitation' between religious subjects and material things find ethicopolitical salience across the private and public spheres that such subjects, things, and cohabitations do so much to conjure.

Some background first: Indonesia is home to roughly 220 million Muslims, most of whom are Sunni in orientation. They predominate

demographically and politically in the country's civic life, and also make up the largest *ummah* (Indonesian, *ummat*) within existing national borders anywhere in the world. Muslims were, of course, the leading figures in the founding of the Republic of Indonesia, its constitution, its bureaucratic and jural institutions, and its culture of governance. Some in the *ummat* wished for a theocratic Islamic state, but saw their hopes thwarted as the state and state ideology enshrined religious and ethnic pluralism into law.[18] From the highly nationalist post-independence period under Sukarno, through the statist and development-oriented New Order regime of Soeharto, to today's post-authoritarian experiments in democracy, Indonesian Muslims have been committed to establishing safeguards for promoting the exercise and well-being of Islam, and have shown a desire for the state to act as a religious authority of sorts (especially via the state-controlled Indonesian Council of Ulamas, the *Majelis Ulama Indonesia*, also known as MUI) in managing the religious, cultural, and political diversity within the *ummat*. Although long known as a broadly tolerant *ummat*, vigilante groups (like the Islamic Defense Front – *Front Pembela Islam [FPI]*) and doctrinaire Salafist activists have had success over the past decade and a half in recruiting the state in intimidating or persecuting Ahmadiyya followers, Shia Muslims, the Liberal Islamic Network (*Jaringan Islam Liberal [JIL]*) and ethnoreligious minorities. They also have played a prominent part in policing public morality in anti-blasphemy and anti-pornography campaigns. The popular piety movement, associated with the country's growing middle class and corporate business sector (Hoesterey, 2015; Howell, 2001; Jones, 2010; Rudnyckyj, 2010), has endured for 30 years but eschews the puritanical rigidity of the Salafists and the thuggery of the vigilantes.

The Al-Quran Mushaf Istiqlal

I begin with the *Al-Qur'an Mushaf Istiqlal* – the National Independence Illuminated Qur'an, completed in 1995 (the fiftieth year of the country's independence), and displayed in Jakarta in September of that year as the material centerpiece of the wildly popular Festival Istiqal II, which drew 11 million visitors.[19] Celebrating 'Indonesian cultural arts inspired by Islam' (*seni budaya Indonesia yang bernafaskan Islam*) the festival, and the *mushaf* manuscript in particular, amounted to a civic and artistic project that gave Indonesia's national futures and pasts a Muslim character. The artisanal or aesthetic features of the *Mushaf Istiqlal* – its tremendous size (970 pages, each page measuring 123 x 88 cm), its hand-painted but computer designed illuminations, its meticulous hand-inked calligraphy, the

layout of Qur'anic scripture on its pages, the quality the paper on which the *sura* were inscribed, and the manner in which it was put on display – demanded that this *mushaf* be apprehended as a wonder of modern artistic skill, and testified to the level of development achieved in Indonesia's design sector and by the country more broadly (see Figure 6.1). As one festival organiser told a reporter from the Jakarta daily, *Kompas* (1 October 1995, 2):

> It can be shown historically that many *mushafs* that we consider beautiful were … relevant to the condition of the state. When the state was advanced, with a good economy, arts, science, stable, and secure, beautiful Qur'ans were made. With the production of [our] very beautiful *mushaf*, we want to reflect on the progress reached by the Republic of Indonesia in its 50th year of independence.

The *mushaf* could be read or recited, of course, but its material grandeur and immense size meant that most of its pages were kept in the drawers in a handcrafted teak folio cabinet. Only a limited number of folio pages could be presented on a *rehal* (reading stand), itself an immense hand-carved item. In a sense, the *Al-Qur'an Mushaf Istiqal* was an object meant to be seen, rather than to be handled and read.

By way of border illuminations generated from decorative ethnic arts around the archipelago, the artists and graphic designers behind the *mushaf* inscribed the national social body as a recognisable visual presence within its pages, and so as part of their objectification of divine revelation. The *mushaf* and its artwork in this way put an image of the Indonesian Muslim public on display: ethnically and culturally plural, politically and religiously unified, an always ready and attentive receptacle to God's message and will. That Haji Muhammad Soeharto, the President of Indonesia, was recruited as the *mushaf*'s inaugural and final calligrapher lent the object further state authority and aura, even as his participation in the project bolstered the religious credentials of his regime and presidential leadership. Quite simply, putting his hand to the *mushaf* connected him materially to Allah, and conveyed his legitimacy as steward, or *khalifah*, for the Indonesia *ummat* and its spiritual and political 'development'. Soeharto presented the completed *mushaf* to both the people of Indonesia and to the Muslim world community, thus addressing both national and transnational publics. If the *mushaf* project was a way to consolidate and manage a pluralistic domestic public sphere and link it (and especially middle-class allegiances) to Muslim interests and politics,[20] it also served as an assertion of Indonesia's politico-aesthetic presence and aspirations in *dar al-Islam*.

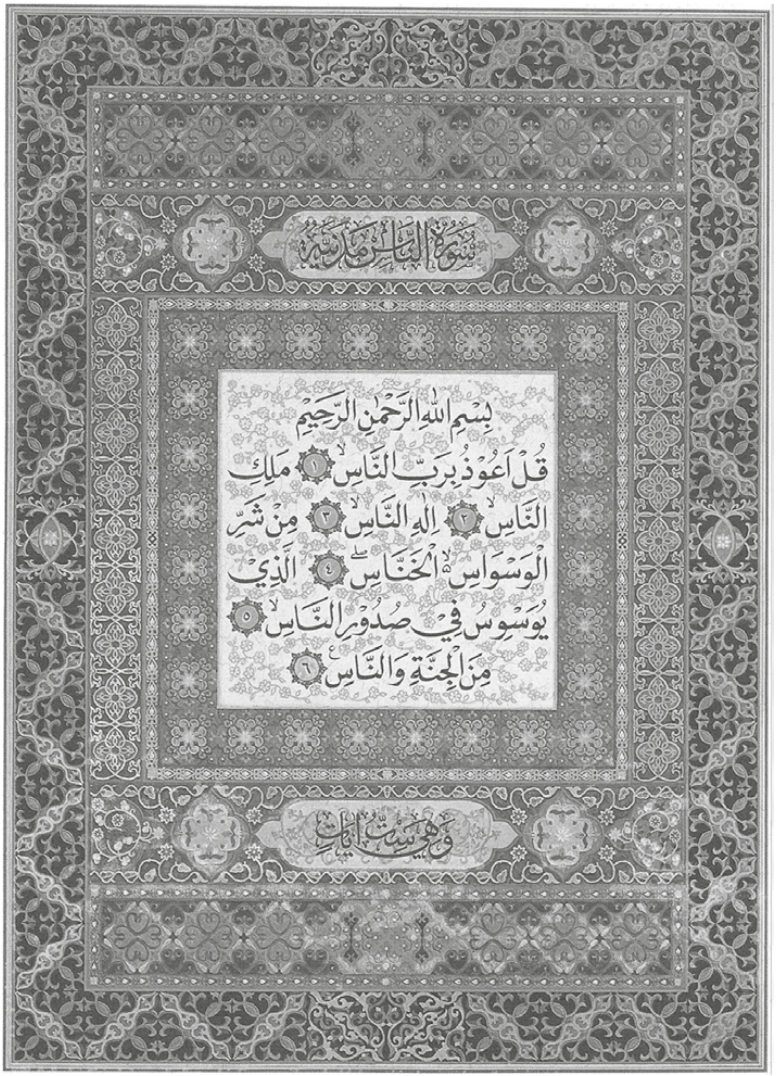

Figure 6.1 A page from the manuscript. Sura 114, *An-Naas* ('Humanity') from the *Al-Qur'an Mushaf Istiqlal*.

During the Soeharto years (1966–1998), national culture was the primary vehicle for expanding state ideology and development programs, and so was typically under close government supervision. Seen in this light, the *mushaf* project was part of an effort to foster a state-controlled

and state-supported form of Islam, much like the annual *Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an* (Qur'anic recitation) festivals. The Ministers and Directors-General of Tourism, Finance, Religious Affairs, and Education and Culture were lead authorities in the Istiqlal Festival, but were joined, too, by corporate leaders and cronies of the regime who helped manage the funding behind the endeavour. Though state control was paramount, we should not overlook the ways in which individuals inhabited the *mushaf* project in pursuit of their own religious and professional aspirations. A team of seven prominent Indonesian Muslim artists, architects, and designers – all based in Bandung – and headed by painter Abdul Djalil Pirous, led in designing and crafting the *mushaf*. For Pirous and his team, the *mushaf* project and the Istiqlal Festival gave them a chance to promote 'contemporary Islamic art' (*seni rupa Islami kontemporar*) and to exercise their piety through artistic practices. In showing fellow Muslims that art could be a Muslim spiritual concern, Pirous and his team were asserting an authority distinct from, but in potential rivalry with, Muslim clerics, teachers, and legal scholars. For the broader public sphere that these Muslim designers had in mind, there must be a 'Muslim art public' made up of experienced and highly-trained artist-citizens who would be able to bring their faith and their nation together.[21] Pursued in this manner, art might transcend and possibly discipline worldly politics.

There were precedents for this view. Progressive Indonesian Muslim writers in the 1950s saw literature and art as vehicles for the beautiful (*husna*), the good (*ihsan*), and the true (*haq*), and vital to the Islamic renewal and Islamic national culture (Kratz 1986). The leading Muslim student organisation of the 1950s issued a resolution stating that national art should be the field of growth and development for Islamic art; that Indonesian art has to try to be in accordance with Islamic art; and that for Islamic art to come into being, Muslims who wished to make art must perfect themselves as true Muslims (Kratz, 1986: 71, 83). By 1962, Indonesian Muslim reformists stressed that Islamic art needed to be based on *tawhid* (God's unity), to reflect devotion to God, to cultivate conduct in line with Islamic teachings, and to benefit the welfare of others. A year later, the same reformists acknowledged art as an acceptable medium for proselytisation and outreach, or *da'wah* (Kratz, 1986). Thus, we see an effort to cultivate ethical and religious alignments between the self, the nation, and art.

By the 1990s these resolutions and alignments appear to have been forgotten by the state's religious authorities, and it was precisely the power and wonder of art that worried them so. 'The Qur'an should not be sacrificed for art', bellowed Minister of Religious Affairs, H. Munawir Sjadzali, when commenting to reporters about the proposed design of

the *Al-Qur'an Mushaf Istiqlal* circa 1993. The illuminations drawn from around the archipelago were not at issue; their presence in the *mushaf* did not, in the view of Sjadzali and his colleagues, disturb or detract from divine revelation. Rather, the Minister objected to innovations in page layout, the placement of verse and recitation markers, and the style of calligraphy.[22] He was joined by the clerics in the MUI and the *Lajnah Pentashih* (the committee tasked with inspecting all Qur'anic publications and manuscripts and making sure they are error-free). Shown precedents from *mushaf* traditions in Turkey and the Middle East, these authorities firmly responded that such design choices were unfamiliar to Indonesians and would be rejected by the Indonesian *ummat*. Innovative design (*bidʿah*) would disrupt recitation. In the end, the clerics prevailed. The designers and clerics agreed that each *mushaf* page would consist of no more than thirteen lines, would be hand-written in the cursive Naskhi calligraphic style (the Arabic *naskh* means 'to copy'), and would contain verse and recitation markers that followed popular convention. Every page would be framed by an illuminated border, generated by computer, but painted by hand. The Lajnah Pentashih would inspect each page.

These decisions over the material design of the mushaf were part of an effort to keep artists and festival planners chastened and in check; to reserve custodial authority for the Qur'an within institutionally demarcated clerical circles; and to keep custodianship within long-established traditions for safeguarding the divine revelation from error or potential diminishment. The propriety of holding the first Istiqal Festival in 1991 at Jakarta's Istiqlal Mosque had been hotly debated in public – may prayer-space be turned into art-space? – and not a few Indonesians looked for signs of God's favor or disfavor at the time the festival opened.[23] (Rain was one of them, but of course this could be read as blessing or curse.) No one had anticipated the immense gathering of 6.5 million festival visitors at the month-long show in 1991. A gathering of this scale could not be attributed to the power of religion alone, and that might have troubled the clerics. The appeal of 'cultural arts' (*seni budaya*) to gather a public, to promote a sense of belonging and attachment to faith and to the nation-state, had been made clear, and clerics took the step of making sure they were not excluded from keeping their hands in the work of religiously-inspired culture. The success of the two festivals and the acclaim heaped on the handsome *Al Qur'an Mushaf Istiqal* prompted Soeharto and his wife to sponsor the construction of the *Museum Bayt Al-Qur'an* ('House of the Qur'an Museum') in Jakarta 1997 to house the *mushaf*. A tense struggle began between the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the (former) Ministry of Education and Culture over the administration and staffing of the museum. This was but yet another episode in

the conflict over how to 'handle' (i.e., control and care for) the *Al-Qur'an Mushaf Istiqlal* in its eye-catching materiality. The Ministry of Religious Affairs won control of the museum only to watch a number of curatorial staff depart, and some artists to withdraw their work from the museum's collections. Potential curators of Qur'anic materials thus found themselves wedged and pulled between the rival discourses and ethical imperatives of 'art' (or 'culture') and 'religion'. The state resolved the dispute between its ministries through recourse to custodial orthodoxy, if I may call it that. Religious, not cultural, authorities were put in charge, a political move that implicitly recognised Islam as the transcendent legitimising force and raison d'ĕtre for the museum and its objects.

The bustier

As the Indonesian clerics and artists hammered out their disagreements over the design of the *Al-Qur'an Mushaf Istiqlal* as an object of veneration and belonging, another design controversy, this one international in scope, spilled into public.[24] On Saturday evening, 15 January 1994, designer Karl Lagerfeld sent supermodel Claudia Schiffer down a Paris catwalk wearing an item from his spring couture collection for the fashion house, Chanel: a strapless, low-cut, black bustier decorated with a panel of Arabic script written out in grey pearl embroidery (see Figure 6.2).[25] The Arabic turned out to be a passage from Sura 36 of the Qur'an – QS 36 *Ya Sin*: 21 – usually recited by Muslims during *tahlil* rites of mourning. It read, from right to left, and from low on the model's abdomen upward past her hips and her waist, and along the curves of her bust: *wa hum muhtaduun*, 'and they are rightly guided'. Reading the script led one's eyes upward along the model's midriff to her bust and bared shoulders. The passage and the act of reading it suggest a salacious quip about well- or rightly-guided eyes, and indeed, reading the Arabic mimicked the purpose of a bustier – pushing up the bust.

Three days later, a newspaper reporter from the Jakarta daily *Republika* handed a picture of Schiffer in the bustier to the head of the MUI, the ultraconservative Kyai Haji Hasan Basri. For him, the bustier was despicable (*makruh*) and a desecration of the Qur'an. It rendered Qur'anic verse as decorative adornment on a distracting garment designed to heighten a woman's sexual allure. 'This is clearly an insult!' said a riled Basri, 'To use the Qur'an as one pleases?' Basri was a key figure in the *DDII* (*Dewan Da'wah Islamiyah Indonesia*, the Indonesian Council for Islamic Prosleytisation) and *KISDI* (*Komite Indonesia untuk Solidaritas dengan Dunia Islam*, the Indonesian Committee for Solidarity with the Islamic

Figure 6.2 The Lagerfeld bustier. Detail from an unattributed photograph appearing in the *Brisbane Courier-Mail*, Saturday 22 January 1994.

World), two organisations who scolded moderate and liberal Indonesian Muslims for failing to grasp global threats to the faith. For him, the bustier was a deliberate insult, designed to bait Muslims into violence, and to make it easy to portray Muslims everywhere as destructive and terrorist, 'just like [Samuel] Huntington's theories did' (quoted from *Republika* in George, 2009: 595). The cleric persuaded the MUI to file a protest with the German Embassy (Lagerfeld and Schiffer were German citizens), and called for a boycott of Lagerfeld designs in Indonesia. Basri and the MUI were the first anywhere in the world to lodge a protest about the offending object, and it was reported in the press globally.

Matters seethed for several days in the European, Middle Eastern, Asian, and Australian press, and a few Muslim Indonesian fashion designers and artists were asked for their comment. All chided or condemned Lagerfeld for his offending design. Lagerfeld denied knowing the Arabic passage came from the Qur'an, and sulkily admitted that he had taken the 'Arabic design' from a book on the Taj Mahal, and had been 'told it was from a love poem'. The southern portal of the Taj Mahal is indeed inscribed with QS 36, *Ya Sin*. A spokesperson for Chanel explained that the designer had 'no idea what the original meaning was. *He was just interested in the*

design from an aesthetic point of view' (italics mine). That explanation, of course, doesn't clarify why that particular phrase from QS 36 (part of verse 21) was copied onto the bustier, and not another (e.g., QS 36 26, 'It was said "Enter Paradise."'). Chanel issued a global apology and had the offending bustier burned, though no Muslim authority called for such a response. Chanel also issued a plea to newspapers and televised news shows to pull photos of the bustier from circulation. (Ironically, Chanel's decision to burn the bustier and to destroy photographic images of it seems aimed at appeasing – and mimicking – the iconoclastic sensibilities characteristically imputed to Muslims.) A week after the Indonesian clerics filed protest, the incident began to fade from view. A few European papers poked fun at the controversy with headlines like 'Blasphemous Bodices', 'Satanic Corsets', and punning references to the Rushdie Affair of 1989. The matter more or less came to a close on the global stage when the rector of the Muslim Institute in Paris accepted Chanel's apology and said that 'God alone could forgive' Lagerfeld for his affront.

As with the *mushaf* case discussed above, it appears that clerics and scholars, rather than artists and designers, wield greater authority in matters involving the Qur'an. They do not restrict their interests to the works and projects of Muslim artists alone, but take it upon themselves to weigh in on the arts whenever they impinge on religious concerns. The Lagerfeld controversy, in particular, helps us recognise that religious authorities are situated in transnational networks of solidarity and debate, such that they not only view themselves as part of a global *ummah*, but also seek a platform to speak for its interests or to act on behalf of the common good of Muslims everywhere, not just within their national public spheres (cf., Salvatore, 2007: 49–51). Basri, MUI, and Chanel all turned to state or national institutions and religious bodies even as they sought to address the global *dar al-Islam*. Thus, we see how in the early 1990s national spheres of Muslim religious authority and international media networks (many with national homes) had begun to mesh together in way that would give the Lagerfeld bustier scandal wide global significance. The forces at work were much the same almost a dozen years later during the Danish cartoon controversy of 2005–2006, except that the development of cyberspace communications greatly amplified the spread and impact of the controversy.

The public, custodial ethics, and Qur'anic objects

The *mushaf* and the bustier are but two sorts of 'Qur'anic objects' that for a time gained stature and visibility as public matters in Indonesia. They

evoked debates about how the Qur'an could be shown publicly, and how both the individual believer and the body politic are to live with divine revelation. Caring for the Qur'an – what I have called a custodial ethics – did not seem in question, or in doubt. A problem or dilemma for those custodial ethics, nonetheless, is the materialisation of the Qur'an in media other than oral recitation, with all its richness and musicality. On the one hand, the Qur'an cannot be cared for unless brought into material form. As such it may be touched and venerated, and kept as a companionable object. Making the *Al-Qur'an Mushaf Istiqlal* was a way for the national Indonesian Muslim *ummat* to show to itself and to the transnational reaches of *dar al-Islam* its collective affection for and devotion to revelation. On the other hand, materialisation of the Qur'an makes it vulnerable to desecration, mishandling, pollution, neglect, and other means of iconoclastic abuse. The Lagerfeld bustier was disturbing for the lack of care it showed toward revelation. Materiality, in this light, appears basic to the exercise of public care and the enlarged public presence of revelation. To put it in a somewhat more political register, materiality seems crucial to summoning and directing moral allegiances; it can be a public affair. The *Al-Qur'an Mushaf Istiqlal*, for example, seemed to call out to the Indonesian Muslim *ummat*, 'Gather around, belong with this marvel, make it yours'.

A danger of the artful object, however, is its capacity to enchant and distract. The artful materiality of the *mushaf* and the visual pleasures it could afford were such that they could take away attention from the Qur'anic message.[26] This is what Sjadzali may have had in mind when he warned about the Qur'an being sacrificed for art. Fearful of distracting pleasures, he was suspicious of art and culture, and how they might misguide the *ummat*. For this same reason, contemporary Indonesian painters exploring 'Islamic art' have had to contend with clerical watchfulness even as they appeal to the interests and desires of the country's Muslim elites and rising middle class (George, 2010, 2012a). The bustier, of course, enchants and distracts in a different way, and instrumentalises Qur'anic verse for aesthetic, erotic, and commercial purposes, thereby diminishing, distorting, or robbing the verse of its divine power or proper recitation. In this respect, the design amounted to a wrongful humiliation of the object (i.e., the Qur'an) so dear to the lives of believers. 'Design', or 'an aesthetic point of view' was accorded transcendent value in art circles, not religion. It isn't just fashion designers or satirical cartoonists in the West who engage in cruel or demeaning gestures toward the Qur'an in the name of art or freedom of expression. Indonesian performance artist Arahmaiani, herself born Muslim, has subjected the name 'Allah' to blows. In her performance piece, 'Breaking Words', she has written the name

'Allah', and other names and words, in Arabic on plates and then smashed them against a wall (Langenbach and Arahmaiani, 2007). Reaction to her work has been acute, and sometimes violent, and it reminds us to take seriously and to not dismiss the sensorial experience of being touched and hurt by an object or by the things that befall it (Verrips, 2008). In Arahmaiani's show, it is as if the artist wished to summon a name-image sacred to and beloved by Muslims, abduct it to another ideological precinct, and then strip it and torture it for the pleasure of seeing its humiliation and hurt in its naked, abject materiality.

In these cases, we should be careful not to equate a public with a mass audience, a body of citizens, or an *ummat*. In the instances I mention, artists and designers come forward as an elite, authoritative class of interpreters and producers who could speak for their interests, justify their projects, and set the social values of the works they made. Countering them were religious authorities and elites who defined certain artistic projects as public (rather than privately expressive) religious concerns. In short, it was experts, not grassroots members of the Indonesian *ummat* or national citizenry, who guided debate about these Qur'anic objects as matters of public concern to Indonesians and Muslims worldwide. Behind them, nonetheless, was the hand of Soeharto, who in recruiting Muslim clerics, intellectuals, and artists to national projects seemed to be intent on capturing the allegiances of the Muslim *ummat* in politically restructuring the Indonesian public sphere under state expansion.

Islamic sensibilities are today at the center of cultural expression in Indonesia. Books, magazines, text-messaging, fashion, music, film, interior design, and accessories for the car and home all provide evidence that religion has seeped further and further into everyday popular material culture. As Islam leaves a more pronounced stamp on Indonesian visual and material culture, fields of cultural and commodity production have come under the sustained watch of clerics and vigilante organisations. The custodial ethic toward Qur'anic objects now increasingly serves political and commercial opportunism and not just the ethical aspirations of the faithful. Indeed, this custodial ethic and the Qur'anic material for which it cares form a space in which the political is discursively and visually produced.

Conclusion

Within the scaffolding of the contemporary, terms like 'public' and 'private', and 'culture' and 'religion' appear to be discursive and material spaces conjured in part to tactically or strategically negotiate (and

perhaps to protect) the force of the transcendent in pluralist polities. My aim in proposing an object-oriented political theology has been to put things at the heart of lived-in public spheres and private life-worlds.[27] The affective attachments surrounding Qur'anic objects like the *mushaf* and the bustier suggest ways in which materiality has to be reckoned into the exercise of statecraft, development, conscience, accountability, and address – into our ethicopolitical footing and into our dwelling in the world together. Some might argue that such objects are small stuff, even as they 'take up residence on the frontlines of political and social conflicts … as combatants, victims, and provocateurs' (Mitchell, 2005: 128). I see a crucial political role for objects precisely because of first, their capacity to constitute or demarcate lines of ideological or political difference, and secondly, their recalcitrance and their capacity to provoke wonder (cf., Bennett 2010: 3). Things figure importantly into our ethical and political alignments, and potentially provide a threshold of detectability for the exercise of power. It is true that objects can go unnoticed or unremarked in everyday life. But objects do come into view, and politics may be about conferring legitimacy on what is visible or audible, and how they are visible and audible. That would include the things – and not just the beliefs – that make up 'religion'. 'Secular modernity', writes Peter van der Veer, 'aims to encompass the sacred icon and give it its limited space' (2016: 82). Yet that encompassment hardly seems assured. Instead, we witness incessant iconoclash in claims over 'culture', 'art', and 'religion' as the worldly touchpoint of the transcendent.[28]

7

Embodying the late King: Buddhist salvation and the sacrifice of sovereignty at a Bangkok mall

Edoardo Siani

'Above the sky, there is still a sky' (*neua fa yang mi fa*), recites a Thai proverb. A hint at the structure of the Buddhist cosmos, the adage warns that in Thailand even the most powerful are subordinate to someone else. Politicians, businessmen, and military leaders defer to kings, and kings defer to past kings, the gods, the Buddha and the Dharma. Reference to the celestial in politics is by no means specific to Buddhism or Thailand, however. As Schmitt (1985) argues, sovereigns in Western societies also invoke the transcendental as the ultimate source of their authority. Early Christian monarchs legitimised their rule by claiming divine vicariate, while contemporary liberal heads of state act in the name of abstract principles such as 'the nation', 'democracy' and 'justice'. Ideologues may claim to have removed God from politics, but, today as in premodern times, 'political theologies', whether religious or secular, remain at the heart of power.

In this chapter, I examine the relationship between power and the celestial in Buddhist Thailand by exploring the problem of sovereignty after the death or 'passing into the heavens' (*kan sawankhot*) of King Bhumibol in late 2016. The demise of the widely venerated monarch raised fundamental questions about the future of the kingdom, as a royalist junta that had installed itself two years earlier with a coup d'état clung to power in the face of pressing demands for popular sovereignty. Focusing ethnographically on the mourning activities featured at a high-end shopping complex in Bangkok, I argue that a public relations campaign neatly contained the threat of an emerging political theology of the people by celebrating the late king as yet another political theology: a god of prosperity. The campaign, a unique type of consumer theatre in the midst of national mourning, then reordered these political theologies

hierarchically in accordance with Buddhist notions of relative divinity, ultimately implying a transfer of sovereign power from the new god to the junta. The question I consider is how sovereignty preserves itself in a Theravada cosmology, where multiple heavenly realms blur the line between the mundane and the transcendental. I thus propose that the question of sovereignty in Thailand intersects in important ways with cosmologies of economics and development.

Royal death as a 'limit situation'

The announcement, late in the afternoon of 13 October 2016, was unexpectedly underwhelming. 'King Bhumibol the Great has reached the heavens (*sawankhot*)' pronounced a young television anchor-man, and in the royal capital it was business as usual. Shops and restaurants remained open and people went about with their ordinary activities. Expressions of sorrow were dignified and contained (see Siani and Phillips, 2016); I will always remember the sight of train commuters sobbing composedly as they read the news on their mobile phones. Overwhelming – if not exactly unexpected – was the aftermath. Junta leader and prime minister General Prayuth Chan-Ocha declared one year of mourning. The population was thus compelled to wear black – the occasional transgressors punished by social sanctions ranging from public shaming to outright beating (Cochrane, 2016). Entertainment venues toned down their parties, dimming signs, lights and music. Televisions, magazines and websites turned black and white. Even the screens of television sets, computers and mobiles for sale at shops switched to monochromatic shades. As the metropolis dimmed, sober obituaries replaced the bright-coloured banners that normally patch its skyline with commercials of skin-bleaching lotions and high-rise condominiums. Many of the obituaries announced that the king would 'be forever in the hearts of the Thai people' (*song sathit nai jai thai niran*).

The passing of a king is always a delicate moment with regards to the preservation of sovereignty. A break in the fabric of power, it may prompt individuals or collectives to propose themselves as candidate sovereigns. In old Siam as elsewhere in Southeast Asia, where no clear rules governed successions to the throne, royal deaths routinely prompted aspiring kings to outdo each other as the 'man of prowess' of the day (Wolters, 1982). Proving one's moral stature by mastering Buddhist idioms of virtue was an essential prerequisite for political power. With the end of Thai absolutism in 1932, individuals and collectives from outside the dynasty

joined the race for sovereignty. The most prominent of these individuals was likely Field Marshal Phibun Songkhram, a republican who ended up cultivating a persona in the manner of a Buddhist sovereign (Gray, 1986: 366–70). His presumption of royal prerogative was finally checked by his own former military allies in 1957 (Thak, 2007: 43–80).

The last decade of King Bhumibol's seventy-year long reign however returned to foster disparate aspirations for sovereignty. As the ageing monarch gradually disappeared from the political scene, a Sino-Thai businessman from outside the dynasty, Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, asserted his popularity as Thailand's new man of prowess (Pasuk and Baker, 2004: 8–9). Massive media campaigns and coups d'état in 2006 and 2014 eventually crushed Thaksin's legacy, but could not extinguish mounting calls for popular sovereignty, be it in the form of an electoral democracy or, in extreme cases, republicanism. In the wake of King Bhumibol's passing, General Prayuth Chan-Ocha warned against such aspirations. 'Don't let anyone take advantage of the situation (*chuay okat*) to insert themselves (*saek khao ma*) and stir conflict', he said in a televised speech after the death announcement (Prayuth, 2016). His words felt particularly ominous when, on the very same night, then-Crown Prince Vajiralongkorn postponed his ascension indefinitely to mourn the passing of his father (Post Today, 2016).

In Thailand as elsewhere, a royal death is one of those 'limit situations' in which 'individuals and collective groups are in-between dissolution of order and aspirations of remaking order' (Wydra, 2015: 4). At such moments, new political theologies emerge (2015). In *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology*, historian Ernst Kantorowicz (1997) demonstrates that monarchies in Christian Europe dealt with the problem of royal deaths by creating a complementary and eternal element to kingship – a second, celestial body for the king. Drawing from theological debates on the dual nature of Jesus Christ and the ensuing notion of papal vicariate, the medieval theory of a king's two bodies posited that a monarch was a terrestrial embodiment of God in the skies and vice versa. Because God never dies, the celestial body of kingship would always survive the demise of kings' mortal bodies, enabling dynasties to enact a spectacle of continuity despite the passing of singular sovereigns. I argue that in 2016 Thailand, power was also preserved through the celebration of a celestial body for kingship. The creation of this political theology, however, followed a different set of rules in this Buddhist country, where the tension between this world and the otherworld, the mundane and the transcendental, is not expressed as an outright dichotomy.

Transcendence in the Thai Buddhist cosmos

Christian cosmology posits a clear demarcation between heaven and earth. The Thai Buddhist cosmos is, however, more like a ladder that runs through multiple worlds and realms, situating beings within a moral hierarchy. Likened to a lotus, which from the mud arises seeking light, the ladder extends upwards toward perfection. This is envisioned as beings' relative embodiment of the Dharma (*thamma*) – the ultimate moral and natural law. Demons (*pisat*) and ghosts (*phi*), who are ignorant of the Dharma, act in discord with morality and nature. They are therefore relegated to the lowest domains of the hells (*narok*). Gods (*thep*), who express a superior understanding of the Dharma, reside in the heavenly realms (*sawan*), redolent of colour and other sensual delights. Humans (*manut*) are located somewhere between the two, with each person oscillating between grace and damnation depending on their knowledge of the Dharma, or embodied quantities of merit (*bun*).

This cosmic hierarchy also supports the elaboration of social stratification. The less fortunate are thus presumed disadvantaged by their lack of dharmic insight, while the more privileged serve as the Dharma's more perfect terrestrial embodiments.[1] Divinity here, expressed in terms of embodied Dharma or merit, is not the defining quality of one man, as in Christian kingship. Rather, it is embodied by all – albeit to different degrees. Nobody knows for sure what one's degrees of divinity can be, but wealth and prestige are taken as good-enough ways to index them. Medieval Siam even featured a bureaucratic system, called *sakdina*, through which individuals were given an actual number on the basis of their relative social standing (Jit Phumisak, 2018). Finally, unlike the caste system of contemporary Hinduism, in Thailand social advancement is possible, in theory at least, through virtuous behaviour, also within the present lifetime (*chat*) (Hanks, 1962; Keyes, 1977: 286).

In such a divinely-stratified society, sovereignty also comes in degrees. A Buddhist monarch is the sovereign par excellence. By definition the most meritorious individual in the land, he embodies greater degrees of divinity than any other layperson. As such, he is the upmost vehicle of both the anthropomorphic deities and the Dharma: as he coronates himself, he embodies the highest gods, who in turn channel the Dharma through him. If Christian kings have two bodies, Thai Buddhist kings therefore have (at least) three (see also Thompson, 2004): a first, physical body, which corresponds to their mortal spoils and serves as a terrestrial simulacrum of the divine; a second, celestial body, equalling the gods in the heavenly realms; and a third, even more perfect body, identifiable with

the Dharma. Attainment of the three bodies is consequential, following individual kings' progress on the path of purification – a journey of moral self-perfection that spans multiple lifetimes and continues into the present (Jory, 2016). The Buddhist doctrine of the three bodies (*trikaya*) (Reynolds, 1977) that is expressed, in different versions, in the Theravada scriptures, is hardly invoked in contemporary Thailand. It is nevertheless reflected in the epithets that people commonly attribute to a Thai king. He is a 'supposed deity' (*sommutithep*), a subtle acknowledgement of his first body; a 'god king' (*thewaracha*); and a 'Dharma-inspired monarch' (*thammaracha*). Unlike their Christian counterparts, then, Thai Buddhist kings are not necessarily *complete* embodiments of the divine. Only enlightened beings like Buddhas and Buddhas-to-be (*phra phothisat*), which a Thai king may or may not be, know and embody the Dharma in its entirety. Being *the most perfect* among humans – or at least among their fellow countrymen – suffices to secure a king's position at the apex of the political community.

When, on 13 October 2016, the mortal body of King Bhumibol expired, he merged with his second body, transforming into a heavenly god.[2] Some suggested that he even attained the body of the Dharma in its entirety, becoming an all-perfect Buddha-to-be. Deification is normative for Thai monarchs, who are customarily thought to be reborn at least as gods because of their extraordinary merit (*bun barami*). King Bhumibol's departure for the heavens (*sawankhot*), however, left the place of the most perfect among humans vacant. Immediate royal succession is necessary for the preservation of sovereignty in Christian monarchies, where royal death and succession are to be announced simultaneously: 'The king is dead, long live the king' (Kantorowicz, 1997: 412). In the absence of an immediate replacement on the Thai throne, an ad hoc public relations campaign intervened to manage the transition in line with this modern Buddhist political theology.

The deification of a developmental king

The deification of King Bhumibol began immediately after the announcement of the royal death. More precisely, a young and virile King Bhumibol crystallised as a heavenly being, while the older monarch perished on the ubiquitous obituaries – his white skin against the black background highlighting the pallor of a man at the end of his life. Beginning on the night of 13 October, every television in the country streamed hagiographies of the king in his prime uninterruptedly for an entire month. Presented in the format of documentaries (*sarakhadi*), the

hagiographies celebrated King Bhumibol as middle-aged as he restlessly toured the countryside in support of those 'royal projects' (*khrongkan luang*) that sealed his popularity during the second half of the Cold War (Chanida, 2007). These were development projects focused mainly on improving the welfare of rural Thais, initially by means of water and land management programs, and later through sustainable agriculture and biodiversity.

The campaign prioritised the late monarch's role in development at the expense of more recent historical moments, including the Diamond Jubilee that in 2006 paid tribute with great pomp to the sixtieth anniversary of his ascension. Reminders of the king's role in development were also prominent at the year-long funerary ceremonies. Day one after his passing, the royal remains reached the Grand Palace (*phra borom maha ratchawang*) on the van (*rot tu*) identified with his development tours. Tiny bags of rice – half the size of my hand – were distributed as tokens (*thi raleuk*) to myriads of people who paid him personal respect during the year-long lying in state. The rice evoked the monarch's developmental efforts in rural areas, while the label on the bag, 'sufficiency' (*pho phiang*), highlighting its diminutive size, referred to his economic theory. The king's 'Sufficiency Economy' (*sethakit pho phiang*) echoed twentieth-century King Vajirawudh's ban on 'Western' economics and call for popular restraint from accumulation (see Thongchai, 1994: 4) as well as Schumacher's (1973) 'Buddhist economics', arguing that development be grounded in moderation and the effective management of natural resources (see Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board of Thailand, 2007). It also appropriated discourses of moral development that emerged as early as in the 1950s among Buddhist monks opposing the development policies of the state (see Feener and Fountain, 2018). Targeting rural Thailand, Sufficiency Economy proved especially captivating for city dwellers.

King Bhumibol's Cold War ventures in national development capitalised on previous monarchs' success in embedding the European *telos* of progress within the Buddhist *theos* of kingship. Drawing from the concept of the *mandala* (*monthon*) of South and Southeast Asian polities, Thai Buddhist cosmology traditionally positions the court at the centre of the kingdom, with the monarch granting prosperity and rendering the soil fertile by disseminating his embodied divinity. In pre-modern times, when discourses of civilisation (*khwam siwilai*) supported the colonial enterprise, Siamese monarchs ruled in the name of progress, disseminating foreign ideas and technological novelties as part of their divinity (see Peleggi, 2002). This formidable project of domination, a mainstay in Thai historiography, officially saved the kingdom from European expansionism

(see Thongchai, 1994; Harrison and Jackson, 2010).[3] Today, the term for 'progress', *khwam jaroen*, still designates a prosperity-conferring type of potency associated with special individuals and objects (Stengs, 2009: 68; Johnson, 2014: 29–31).

Ascending the throne in 1946 concurrent with the rise of intergovernmental organisations like the United Nations and the International Monetary Fund, King Bhumibol anchored his kingship to the new gospel of development (*kwham phatthana*) (Fountain et al., 2015: 41; see also Cullather, 2004). As with his predecessors, this move validated his mandate both in Thailand and abroad. During his reign, development thus followed the traditional flow of divinity, from high to low, from heaven to earth, from the capital to the periphery, from the monarch to his subjects in accordance with 'nature' ('*thammachat*'), 'that which arises from the Dharma'. As a Bangkok-based religious teacher explained to me, these days a good king fulfils his duty to disseminate potency (*phae barami*) by 'giving hospitals, schools, aid to people'. This was the ideal monarch crystallised in the political theology of late 2016. It was the legendary King Bhumibol of the late Cold War era – but with a twenty-first-century twist.

The green and the gold

The *telos* of development has long been manifesting in the luxurious shopping malls of downtown Bangkok. Here, Thailand's image as a 'third world' (*lok thi sam*), or 'developing country' (*prathet thi kamlang phatthana*), as the later discourse would have it, instantly dissipates for Thai and foreign shoppers alike. In the pristine buildings of its flashiest shopping malls, Thailand displays all the outer characteristics of an economic superpower. With boutiques of the world's most expensive brands, international restaurants and state-of-the-art entertainment venues, Bangkok malls are the perfect medium for development to assert its advent.

The pinnacle of Thai shopping paradises is 'Golden City' – a pseudonym that I will use here for the mall where I conducted fieldwork. Golden City boasts three high-rise buildings in an exclusive neighbourhood. The complex was inaugurated approximately one year before the royal death as a refurbishment and an extension of an existing upscale mall. It was raised above street level – height being associated with divinity in Southeast Asia (Tooker, 1996) – and connected to a station of the BTS, a futuristic transport system that runs immaculate 'skytrains' above an often-degraded urban landscape. As Hewson (1996) notes, shopping malls have proliferated over the past few decades, hand-in-hand with a

growing urban middle class. As the primary centres of social life in contemporary Bangkok, malls have come to replace the Grand Palace as the primary seat of prosperity in the kingdom. Despite this waning of palatial pre-eminence, however, royal dominance remains asserted through an urbanism, architecture and iconography that emphasise linkages between the city's upmost centres of consumption and the generous Crown (Unaldi, 2016: 111–43).

After the royal death, shop windows inside Golden City displayed black clothes only. The usual music was silenced in all corridors, and entrances to the main shopping areas featured black-clad mannequins minus heads – a macabre reminder of the dress code.

In November, however, a spectacle broke the gloom. An animated film almost ten minutes long, projected onto the external walls of the complex and visible from the plaza connecting it to the skytrain, erupted in bursts of music and colour. Played every evening, it was so grandiose that one could not look away. It opened with a jewel-like image evocative of a crown, moving outward and regenerating in new forms as it cascaded out from its centre. Still photographs of an older King Bhumibol, at times with his consort, Queen Sirikit, appeared at the centre only to vanish into blinding light. After images of a Buddhist temple, an anime-style avatar of the middle-aged King Bhumibol entered the scene as if he were visiting the countryside on his development tours. A single bead of sweat – a recurrent theme in his iconography 'symbolis(ing) his self-denying disposition' (Stengs, 2009: 226) – fell from his face transforming into solid gold as he passed by an assembly of kneeling peasants. The passage of the development king at the wheel of a green military jeep then turned a barren rural landscape into a green field with trees springing out of the grass and solidifying into gold. Drops of rain, which evoked the cloud insemination technology patented by the late monarch, suddenly poured down, becoming crystal in mid-air, and transforming the landscape again into gold. The film climaxed with an image of the Grand Palace, surrounded by anachronistic huts, all of which morphed into gold. It ended, in a triumph of music, with mourners prostrated before the walls of the palace solidifying, rows upon rows, into gold.

The animation celebrated the late king as a god of prosperity by showing the effects (*phon*) of his development work in the realm of material accumulation. The celebration of King Bhumibol as a god of prosperity through mediatic spectacle long preceded his death (Jackson 2009; see also Morris 1998). The film's treatment of his development work, however, was likely unprecedented. Conveying a metamorphosis of green into gold, it portrayed nature, the original target of the royal projects, as merely an intermediary stage in a journey toward abundant wealth.

The film's emphasis on wealth aligns with the ambitions of contemporary Thai Buddhists, who turn to religion as a means of attaining this-worldly prosperity (see, for example, Jackson, 1999; Pattana, 2008; Scott, 2009; McDaniel, 2011). The departure from nature resonates, too, with the preoccupations of urbanites who shop at Golden City, who have little interest in securing abundant rainfall and fertile lands. One might suggest that the transition from green to gold also portrays the exploitation of the countryside as necessary for wealth to concentrate in the capital – a malicious suggestion, were it not grounded in the historical relationship between Bangkok and rural Thailand.

Wealth now features as a prominent theme in the political theologies of societies across the globe, evolving from a sign of otherworldly salvation to an ultimate end, a *finis*, in its own right (Goodchild, 2009). Thailand displays its own participation on such broader trends, transitioning from a state-promoted capitalism with Buddhist undertones to a celestial economy gravitating around the actions, and now also the legacy, of the late king. During the Cold War, King Bhumibol worked to restore a financially unstable throne (Handley, 2006: 114–38). In the 1970s, as the monarch's power and presence intensified in society, a major bank that used a lotus as its logo encouraged Sino-Thai entrepreneurs to contribute to the business and ritual ventures of the Crown, suggesting linkages between returns on investment and accumulated merit (*barami*) (Gray, 1986). By partaking in the monarchy's inherently moral activities, wealthy families previously stigmatised because of Chinese ethnicity seamlessly emerged into the more divine circles of society. Success in business thus came to index an individual's moral stature in a way similar to that identified by Weber (1958) in Protestant-derived capitalism (see Gray, 1986).

The king's later penning of 'Sufficiency Economy' hardly challenged the Buddhist correlation of wealth and salvation. Rather, his calls for savings and restraint elegantly underscored the importance of accepting one's economic stature as a rightful expression of the dharmic order by learning 'how to feel enough' (*ru jak pho*). 'Sufficiency Economy' acquired a greater meaning – and became the object of controversy – when state forces promoted it vigorously in the wake of the devastating financial crash of 1997 (see Rossi, 2012). Fast forward to 2016, and watch wealth become a *finis* as a new hierarchy materialised on the walls of Golden City.

A hierarchy of embodiments

In a Theravada cosmos, sovereignty is a function of divinity. Like divinity itself, it therefore exists in degrees. As the political crisis engulfed

the end of King Bhumibol's reign, citizens who aligned themselves with the royal axis expected their sovereignty to be greater than others' precisely by claiming greater knowledge of the Dharma. They thus attempted to exclude the supporters of Thaksin Shinawatra from political decision-making by the fact that they had greater embodied merit, manifest in their supposedly more privileged social standing (Funahashi, 2016). Disappointed by the 'one person, one vote' system, they even courted the idea of ditching electoral democracy altogether in favour of a nebulous 'Dharmacracy' (*thammathipatai*) – government led by an enlightened few. Eventually they settled, more or less happily, for military intervention.

The animation's transition to gold via an intermediary stage of green reinforced the political beliefs of the target shoppers of Golden City. Middle- and aspiring urban middle-class, they are generally thought to be most sympathetic to the arguments of the junta (see Vorgn, 2017). At the height of the crisis, opposed factions asserted their respective political creeds through a code of colours. The supporters of the royalist junta wore yellow (*si lueang*), associated astrologically to the late monarch, born on a Monday, while those of Thaksin Shinawatra wore red (*si daeng*), yellow's unlucky obverse. Green (*si khiaw*) denoted the military, highlighting its abnormally expanded role in politics. The animation, by showing green as a mere – if crucial – intermediate stage toward gold, implied the military intromission in domestic affairs via the 2014 coup as temporary and necessary (see Agamben, 2005) for the greater good, identified with a new concentration of wealth.

More than that, the film also conveyed the military's fitness to embody the late king's legacy. As endless lines of mourners dressed in black waited hours in line to pay respect to the royal remains (*phra boromasop*) at the Grand Palace, the Buddhist heavens (*sawan*) had acquired yet a new anthropomorphic god through which aspiring leaders could channel their political disposition – that of the development king. The transition from green to gold thus implied the men in green as the best embodiment (*tua thaen*) for said god, enabling his work to continue its course in the kingdom. The role of the military – who in fact did serve as the king's 'personal task force for royal projects' (Handley, 2006: 291) in the 1980s – as the god's vehicle was underscored by the military green jeep driven by the anime monarch. In its entirety, the film was merely setting the tone for a hierarchy of embodiments.

One evening, as I walked into the pure white elevated plaza of Golden City, I found myself in the midst of a black-clad audience holding funerary candles at a concert. As if the sight and the loud music were not enough, the lead singer suddenly incited the crowd to sing along and cheer up, shouting in English: 'Laugh! Ha! Ha! Ha!' I was taken aback. The concert,

organised by the influential forces behind the mall, certainly represented the will of some authority. A drone flying overhead, evoking the junta's much-vaunted surveillance network, reinforced the idea that the event was monitored by people well *above* us. The rules of mourning, I sensed, could not have possibly been broken by accident. I learned that the concert was organised in honour of the late king, featuring jazz songs he had composed in his youth.

The key difference between the concert and the animation is that the film did not appear to have been crafted by graphic designers associated with the mall. Rather, the spectacle seemed to originate from the luminous crown, leaving the spectator in awe not at the work of some mortal employee, but at that of the development king himself. This animation appeared as a natural expression of his embodied Dharma, which is typically conveyed by Thai Buddhist saints to ordinary people through visual mediums (Gray, 1995). The concert, likewise resorting to sensory means, invited the audience to admire the performers as they channelled the king's music, thus treating singer and band, for the moment at least, as an embodiment of the king's superior virtue. It additionally incited the crowd to be part of that collective body.

Like the military, select civilians were therefore also encouraged to embody the late king. But with a key difference. Jazz was King Bhumibol's most famous passion in his early days on the throne, when he wowed Thai and international audiences by playing wind instruments (Handley, 2006: 147). As the Cold War intensified, that image of a jet-setting monarch disappeared. In 1967, local intellectuals and foreign media called upon the young king to intervene in the local political scene, persuading him to abandon his musical hobby and take up arms (Handley, 2006: 180–93). Donning the military uniform, the king promptly demonstrated a willingness to sacrifice for the sake of the nation. It was the beginning of a new era, as the king advanced along his path of purification. The communist insurgency having been contained by the early 1980s, the then-middle-aged king travelled the countryside to promote development. A Buddhist renouncer, he became immortalised as a hard-working leader, so dedicated to improving the livelihood of his subjects as to not even concede himself the futile joy of a smile (Handley, 2006). Perfecting the ten virtues of the Buddhist king (see Jory, 2016), he had now entered the highest stages of the path or purification.

Performers and shoppers at the Golden City could also be momentary vehicles for the transmission of the late king's celestial legacy. But not that of the spiritually-elevated development king. Beings who have a potentiality for divinity – and thus for power – but who are not there yet, they were assigned a less cosmologically advanced manifestation

(*phak*) of him. Like a time machine, the jazz concert simultaneously took the mall back to early Cold War Thailand, an underdeveloped country, underscoring their inability to progress without the leadership of the enlightened monarch. Likewise, it drew the audience back into a period of insurgency, implying easy comparison between the threat of 'communists' (*khommiunit*) and the present-day 'red shirts' (*suea daeng*). Now, as in the distant and recent past, the nation is plagued by the threat of insurgency and, in response, it needs strong men willing to don the uniform of the military and embrace the rifle.

The singers' attempts to involve the audience in a moment of rock and joy additionally implied reassurance that, despite the mourning, they could enjoy the prosperous lifestyle offered at the mall in a moral way. The music, legitimate enough for a young king, was certainly appropriate for sovereign-wannabes. Even more, the concert depicted their enjoyment at the mall as a means to honour the development king's memory – the culmination of a master project initiated by him. Phillips (2017) writes that, in the wake of King Bhumibol's death, buying products associated with his legacy became an act of devotion, enabling middle-class shoppers to feel closer to a king 'whose physical presence transfigures into a spiritual one'. A temple to royally-bestowed consumerism, the Golden City celebrated the fruits (*phon*) of his selfless work and sacrifice.

The appearance of trees

Within weeks of the concert, a gold abstract metal structure reminiscent of trees appeared in the plaza. The structure echoed the themes in the animation film, suggesting that golden trees had magically grown where the king's sweat and the raindrops had fallen from the projection. The main feature of the structure were long garland-like stands of golden stars in the shape of a weeping willow. Initially short and incomplete-looking, the branches could be extended by shoppers. Smiling young hostesses encouraged them to write their 'resolutions of goodness' (*panithan khwam di*) for the upcoming New Year on glossy plastic stars, which they could then hang on the branches. Visitors could broadcast their sanctity to the world by photographing themselves inside a nearby booth and sharing the memory on social media.

Trees play a central role in Buddhist myth and iconography. Of course, the Buddha became enlightened under a bodhi tree (*ton pho*). The *Three Worlds* (*traiphum*), a fourteenth-century cosmological treatise that is the basis of Thai Buddhist cosmology, includes mention of 'wishing trees'. These beautiful and magical trees are depicted in proximity to spiritually

elevated beings: in the realm of the *devata* deities (*thewada*) (see Reynolds and Reynolds, 1982: 233); on the plain of extraordinarily meritorious humans (Uttarakuru, or *utarakuruthawip* in Thai) (1982: 133); and in the palace of Jotaka, a man of great wealth (1982: 189). Such fortunate beings help themselves freely to their branches, from which hang all kinds of desirables, like gorgeous clothes, luminous jewellery, sumptuous fruit. Those who experience visions of wishing trees at the time of their death, also states the *Three Worlds*, will be reborn in the heavens (1982: 214). Wishing trees additionally feature in the myth of Phra Malai, a monk who, like Dante in *The Divine Comedy*, visited the heavens and the hells. From his journey, Phra Malai learned that wishing trees will appear in the present world after the second coming of the Buddha, when, prior to his final extinction or Nirvana (*pari nipphan*), he is reborn as the Maitreya (*phra si an*) (Igunma, 2013: 78).

Trees are a recurrent theme in the hagiography of King Bhumibol, too. The monarch was credited with planting countless tress in response to deforestation, brought by unenlightened development, and all good Thais are compelled to follow his example. A song, recorded by superstar 'Bird' Thongchai McIntyre for the fiftieth anniversary of the king's ascension, put the iconic association into music: 'Father used his sweat instead of water to water [the trees], for their flowers to blossom and us to grow up in their soothing shade' (*pho chai gnuea thaen nam rod long pai, phuea hai phli dog bai ok phon hai rau thuk thuk khon toeb to yang rom yen*). This language clearly evokes the sensory delights of the Buddhist heavens. In late 2016, when the rules for mourning began to loosen up, the song could be heard playing on a loop in malls throughout the royal capital.

The sudden apparition of star-decorated trees at Golden City suggested that the shoppers, like the meritorious beings of the *Three Worlds*, had found themselves on a higher cosmological plain than your average nobody. It thus indicated continuities between the elevated plaza and the celestial ascension of the middle classes, their spending power celebrated as a potential sign of salvation. The relationship between the animation and the gold structure, however, implied that such salvation as manifest in worldly privilege remained dependent on the work of the development king, stressing once more the importance of worshipping the right god in a period of political polarisation. Salvation and social fragmentation are explicitly linked in Thai Buddhism. The myth of Maitreya predicts that the Buddha will return precisely in a time of social dissolution to save those who recognise his virtue. Traditionally, Theravada Buddhist kings propose themselves as Maitreya-like beings (see Ladwig, 2014).

Like the surprising jazz concert, the mall rituals surrounding the gold trees made apparent the potential of virtuous action. The most ambitious

shoppers could thus progress along their own path of purification by practicing selflessness – so amply demonstrated by the late king – in the manner of higher beings. Remarkably, although the hostesses gave no instructions regarding what they should write, the resolutions left hanging from the trees ended up being remarkably similar. Some of those I read recited: 'I will do good things for Dad (*phuea pho*)'; 'I will take responsibility for my own actions;'; 'I will behave for Dad (*pho*)'; 'I will follow the Five Precepts (*sin ha*)';[4] 'I will be happy in a simple way;'; 'I will live in accordance with Sufficiency [Economy] (*yang pho phiang*);'; 'I will be a good person for society;'; and 'I will follow in Dad's footsteps (*tam roy pho*)'.

Geertz (1980: 130) memorably argued that, in Balinese court culture, 'to visualise (is) to see, to see to imitate, and to imitate to embody'. Moved by the sight of the Dharma as embodied in the anime development king, the shoppers vowed to follow his example of contributing to a better society. They therefore set out to embody his actions, gradually working their way up to the level of the second, celestial body of a Buddhist sovereign. As quasi-celestial beings pursuing a path upwards from the lower stations of the cosmic ladder, they implicitly recognised their inadequacy as moral individuals and thus sovereigns. Immensely responsive to their moral-*cum*-cosmological subordination within the political theology of the late monarch, they ultimately embraced their role of 'children' (*dek*), instantiating the state ideology of benevolent patriarchy (Thak, 2007; Bolotta, 2017).

Infantilised and yet more privileged than your average citizen, the middle-class visitors to the Golden City found themselves preparing for a new year and a new historical era. At a deeply unsettling turning point for the nation, they received reassurance that, despite the passing of the cherished monarch, his example would still provide avenues for salvation. Like the younger sovereign who immersed himself in music, they may content themselves with finding prosperity at the mall, where consumerism and submission to the kingdom's men in green – greater embodiments of the development king – leave one in the awe of heavenly wishing trees. Those who aspire for a more central role in the political community may otherwise try to master the virtue of self-sacrifice. Controversially, the first sacrifice they were assigned is precisely that of their own sovereignty.

Conclusion

As in the (post-)Christian world, sovereignty in Buddhist Thailand resides in the ability of individuals to speak for the celestial. The public relations campaign at the Golden City acknowledged an incipient

political theology of the people by implying recognition of the shoppers' elevated moral standing and political ambitions. It thus drew them into a distinct sensory dimension through symbolic associations: the king with the celestial, the military with the king. Spectacle and consumer theatre ultimately painted a celestial-*cum*-political order that subordinated the citizens to the junta during a period of transition. As it turns out, this was the perfect prelude for King Maha Vajiralongkorn to take the throne as a military king, the kingdom's new warrior-in-chief (see Jackson, 2017). Having ascended retroactively on 1 December 2016[5], the new monarch subordinated the junta to his rule. He then underwent his coronation, in May 2019, on the exact same date that his father did sixty-nine years earlier, asserting himself as the purest embodiment of King Bhumibol's legacy. Above the sky, goes the proverb, there is always a sky.

8

Being alone: the political theology of the development citizen

Sam Han

This chapter aims to investigate the political theology of development in South Korea through an analysis of trends in popular and media culture in the context of its unique circumstances vis-à-vis modernity. It focuses on the cultural production of a particular form of citizenship – development citizenship, which I suggest, serves as the subjective basis for what I have in other work called 'spiritualised nationalism' (Han, 2017).

The chapter takes cues methodologically and conceptually from media-focused cultural studies (Fiske, 1992; Kellner, 2003; Morley, 2003), in particular the work of Toby Miller (2007) on cultural citizenship and media, and, in a similar vein, tries to analyse how South Koreans, especially young South Koreans, conceive of and put into practice solitude (or just 'being alone') in the context of what social theorists in East Asia have called 'compressed modernity'. There is, as Miller writes, an 'uneasy interdependence of citizenship, consumption and politics' (2007: 29). He rightly notes, 'the citizen and the consumer have shadowed each other'. Today, they commingle, with the citizen 'adopting the tenets of the consumer' and becoming 'a desirous, self-actualising subject who still conforms to general patterns of *controlled* behaviour' and the consumer 'adopting the tenets of the citizen' and becoming 'a self-limiting, self-controlling subject who still conforms to general patterns of *purchasing* behaviour'. The lines between citizenship and consumption are 'less sharply drawn than ever' (2007: 31).

One can, and this is the conceit of this chapter, establish and maintain her relationship to the nation-state through consumption – whether on media such as TV or YouTube or, as will be mentioned later, with the eating of actual food. In the case of South Korea, the prevailing cultural and media trends around 'being alone' can be understood as the construction of a 'development citizen' that is self-reliant but not simply as a

recapitulation of the liberal, rugged individual of de Tocqueville. Further, unlike the productive subject of industrial society or its neoliberal variant, with its capacity for flexibility, mobility, and adaptation, the 'development citizen' presented here operates with a tragic sense of life – full of insecurities and vulnerable to the frequent ups and downs of market logic as well as the continuing decline state protections such as welfare. While on the one hand dealing with similar structural forces as neoliberal globalisation in the West, the compressed modern subject of East Asia – the development citizen – experiences it somewhat differently, and the resultant forms of citizenship bear rather contradictory aspects when compared to Western Europe or North America. In the South Korean example, I contend, we can observe something similar but a form of citizen-subjectivity that requires a set of self-recuperating practices that the citizen herself is to provide.

This chapter investigates two interrelated features of this particular form of citizen-subjectivity – political theology and popular culture. It suggests that the means of proliferation, in addition to policy changes, have to do with media, and the means of representing proper 'ways of being' to the citizenry. The production and spread of 'development citizenship' involves not only mediatised but also theological ways of being.

The chapter proceeds by first laying the groundwork for politico-theological implications of this form of citizen-subjectivity. Drawing from the work of Talal Asad, the first section wades into the discourse around citizenship and theology, proposing a move away from conceptualising citizenship as a political medium, which transformed the nation-state into a secular entity with theological features. Instead, following Asad, it calls for a shift in focus – from the shared common structure between theological and political concepts to the differential ways in which modernity has produced forms of citizenship in specific contexts (Asad, 2003: 190). The chapter then moves onto explore one of these different contexts: South Korea. In discussing the importance of the dual discourses of 'the nation' and 'development' in recent South Korean history, this section explicates in detail the concept of 'compressed modernity'. After doing so, it moves onto contemporary South Korean cultural trends, particularly the discourse and media associated with solitude, including reality TV programs on living alone, the phenomena of *mukbang* (a portmanteau, which translates to 'eating broadcast') whereby individuals broadcast themselves overeating on Internet platforms, and the much talked-about cultural trend of eating and drinking solo in contemporary South Korea. In all, I suggest that this aloneness is procured for the sake of the nation through methods that are at once theological and mediatised but act in large part to deflect attention to structural social

change, placing the burden of adaptation and flexibility onto the individual. I end with some thoughts on how this falls in line and also, in some ways, diverges from contemporary discourses on neoliberal subjectivity, which, I suggest, presents an opportunity to reengage concepts such as 'the therapeutic' and the 'culture of narcissism'.

A political theology?

Recent work in the field of political theology has been described as a resurgence of interest amid shifting social and political conditions. As Clay Crockett argues, the contemporary rise of religion 'represents a crisis of modern liberal capitalism' (Crockett, 2011: 2). Drawing attention to the concomitant status of liberalism and secularism, Crockett rehearses the argument familiar by-now to many in religious studies and social theory: the blurring of the lines between the secular and religious has necessitated a rethinking of the political foundations of what is considered and recognised to be 'religious' (Calhoun, Juergensmeyer, and VanAntwerpen, 2011; Gorski et al., 2012). Indeed, this argument, for Crockett, offers a particular significance for understanding 'political philosophy' and 'political theology'. As he writes, '[i]f religion and secularity cannot be neatly separated, we cannot fully separate or distinguish political philosophy from political theology'. 'In a post-secularist environment', he continues, 'we possess no absolute or certain criterion by which to claim that any phenomenon is theological as opposed to nontheological' (Crockett, 2011: 2).

This argument is one that has many propagators, of which Talal Asad is perhaps the most prominent. He asserts that 'secularism' arises out of the political history of the Euro-American model of the 'nation-state'. It 'builds on a particular conception of the world ("natural" and "social") and of the problems generated by that world' (Asad, 2003: 191). Secularism, therefore, 'presupposes' certain concepts such as 'religion' and 'politics'. The primary illustration of this point is citizenship. Building on the earlier work of Charles Taylor, Asad argues that secularism is the 'transcendent mediation' that allows for citizenship to be the 'primary principle of identity' under the framework of the modern nation-state. Citizenship therefore is the 'political medium', which 'redefines and transcends particular and differentiating practices of the self that are articulated through class, gender and religion' (Asad, 2003: 5). Citizenship and nationalism require the formation of the secular in order to make sense (Asad, 2003: 193).

We could of course view this version of the development of modernity through the lens of political theology. Indeed, if religion and secularity

can no longer be meaningfully separated, then we could see 'citizenship' as somewhat of a religious phenomenon. Undoubtedly, this is what Crockett alludes to in his comments about political *philosophy* versus political *theology*. Carl Schmitt, the most well-known proponent of this view, argues that all political concepts are secularised theological ones, which have been decontextualised and recontextualised as a result of historical development. In order to properly understand these concepts, especially as they pertain to theories of the state, Schmitt suggests, one must tend to their 'religious' origins (Meierhenrich and Simons, 2016).

Bryan Turner argues similarly, suggesting that contemporary 'national, secular politics' are 'parasitic upon deeper, more embedded, religious traditions' in part due to the 'lack of religious symbols, practices and rituals' and their attendant power and authority (Turner, 2006: 210). This characterisation seems to flow from the Schmittian argument. Indeed, Turner posits that 'national politics' emerge through a process of secularisation. In an effort to 'find an authentic idiom' as it 'lacks emotional force', political cultures end up crafting 'civil religions', which are, in effect, 'religious nationalisms' (Turner, 2006: 216). There are elements of a chosen people, a covenant and also some degree of 'messianic expectancy' in political cultures. (One could easily point to former US President Barack Obama's 'Hope' poster during his first election campaign.) For Turner, then, 'nation building' as such consists of the 'complex relationship between citizenship and religion' (Turner, 2006: 216).

Asad, however, seems to caution against such a perspective, as it too easily labels certain concepts as 'religious' without fully appreciating their co-constitution with modern secular, political ones. In other words, for there to be 'religious' origins to 'secular' concepts, religious concepts must, accordingly, *precede* secular ones. Asad questions not only the sequential nature of this argument but also its definitional stabilising of religion. After all, what 'counts' as religion – both in terms of social location and theology – is historically fluid. If we were to follow the Schmittian argument, it would mean that religion's substance and social function were constant through time. Asad therefore calls for a shift in focus – from the shared common structure between theological and political concepts to differential results (Asad, 2003: 190).

Indeed, as he famously remarks, 'the social, that all-inclusive secular space that we distinguish conceptually from variables like 'religion', 'state', 'national economy', and so forth, and on which the latter can be constructed, reformed, and plotted, didn't exist prior to the nineteenth century'. He goes on:

> Yet it was precisely the emergence of society as an organisable secular space that made it possible for the state to oversee and facilitate an

> original task by redefining religion's competence: the unceasing material and moral transformation of its entire national population regardless of their diverse 'religious' allegiances. In short, it is not enough to point to the structural analogies between premodern theological concepts and those deployed in secular constitutional discourse, as Schmitt does, because the practices these concepts facilitate and organised differ according to the historical formations in which they occur. (Asad 2003: 191)

Unlike many scholars in the field of political theology, I argue that Asad's work must first of all be read as a call for a non-linear, historical perspective on the *mutual constitution* of religion and secular politics. Rather than a Schmittian genealogical and teleological ontogenesis, Asad examines, in my view, the ways in which the practices of the self are not simply at one stage religious and then in another secular. The self, among other things, does not demonstrate any sort of trans-historical consistency. In point of fact, one of the primary aims of this chapter is to heed Asad's call for a different sort of analysis of political theology, which pays attention to historical formations and context, in which a 'self' is produced and equipped with practices.

Development citizenship as spiritualised nationalism

Here, in this chapter, the historical formation under question is what Arif Dirlik has called 'developmentalism' and the context is South Korea. To begin, we can address Dirlik's definition of developmentalism as an ideological orientation 'characterised by fetishisation of development, or the attribution to development of the power of the natural or even divine force' (Dirlik, 2014: 30). The term 'fetishism' itself of course has religious implications originally as, in anthropological discourse, a fetish is an object with supernatural powers. By this, Dirlik is trying to point out the fact that 'development' is offered up as a solution to nearly all social problems. This can be seen in a variety of global contexts, especially as 'capitalism has become global with the proliferation of export-oriented economies'. With that comes the spread of developmentalism, which 'has become global' especially as 'societies in Eastern Asia, including China' have fully hopped on board the developmentalist agenda (Dirlik, 2014: 46). Dirlik reports, however, that there has been significant 'anxiety about development being out of control'. In China, itself seen as the bastion of development, there has been intense uncertainty around 'blood-stained GDP', referring to a series of infrastructural failures that

are widely perceived as a result of rushed construction and too little governmental oversight (Dirlik, 2014: 32).

The same can be said for Indonesia. As anthropologist Daromir Rudnyickj details, the 'faith in…[the] decades-long project of state-led nationalist developmentalism appears to be almost out of steam' (Rudnyckyj, 2010: 3). Faith in development, he argues, is giving way to 'developing faith'. In particular, he tracks how disaffection with developmentalism correlates with the decline of a particular model of citizenship and nationalism.

As he writes:

> Faith in development was premised on the nation-state as the principle agent of modernisation supported through state investment in the space of the nation, to a market-based system that caters to private, transnational capital. Faith in the development was premised on the nation-state as the principle of modernisation, insofar as it was anointed with the power to bring about the utopian visions upon which development was founded. (Rudnyckyj, 2010: 3)

Today, this faith is under question as state development has not necessarily brought about the 'dramatic transformations' that had been promised initially. As a result, Rudnyckj demonstrates, there have been efforts for 'spiritual reform' in the form of initiatives such as the ESQ (Emotional and Spiritual Quotient) program in which 'the ethical dispositions rooted in religion are cultivated to enable the transition away from state-led modernisation' (Rudnyckyj, 2010: 3). The popular ESQ program, formed by Ary Ginanjar, consists of a training regimen for workers made up of a 'diverse assemblage of Islamic prayer, management knowledge, Qu'ranic recitation and popular psychology' (Rudnyckyj, 2010: 5). It has been adopted widely by many different organisations. As he describes it, these training programs do the work of 'spiritual reform', forming an ethics, that is, 'practices of embodied existential and conceptual self-transformation through inquiry and reflection on self and others' (Rudnyckyj, 2010: 6). In dubbing this 'developing faith', Rudnyckyj suggests that these recent shifts amount to religious identity substiuting for nationalist identity – all in the service of growing the nation's economy.

In South Korea, this 'development citizenship' also takes on the form of a spiritualised nationalism, particularly when viewed within the framework of 'compressed modernity'. Championed by East Asian social theorists, especially from South Korea and Japan, to describe the unique experience of modernity of the so-called Asian Tigers that went under rapid development in the latter half of the twentieth century, 'compressed

modernity' gives an analytic framing for how to describe the rapid transformations that occurred in fifty years, which, in the core nations of the West, took approximately 150 years.

As Chang Kyung-sup points out, the economic miracle that so many Koreans had felt as a point of pride is actually a product of awkward fits, at least in relation to Western modernity. South Korean capitalism, in particular, since independence from Japan after World War II, has been organised around the strange bed fellowship between *chaebol* (large family-owned conglomerates) and politicians. Indeed, one would not be wrong to view the economic growth of South Korea as overly reliant on these large conglomerates. In fact, to this day, the four largest amount to 46 per cent of the economy. Samsung, the biggest, accounts for 20 per cent on its own, leading some outlets to describe South Korea as 'the Republic of Samsung' (Weissmann, 2012). The 'compressed transition' from military rule to civilian democracy resulted in the prioritising of growth over democracy. This growth-first ethos was solidified after the Korean War under a successive sequence of military dictators, who, whether out of convenience or ideology (although the former seems to be more accurate), tapped on members of the existing elite and subsidised a good deal of their ventures. While this has 'worked' (and by this, with great opposition from pro-democracy movements and the jailing and torturing of dissidents), the system has begun to unravel.

'Unexpected costs and risks that threaten the sheer sustainability, not to mention the further development, of the current social and economic conditions' emerged in the mid-1990s during the Asian Financial Crisis and the IMF bailout, resulting in 'a most unnerving realisation in this regard [which] is that what they have built up in such a hurry turns out to be a highly collapse-prone economic, political and social system' (Chang, 1999: 31). Chang points to the example of various accidents that have plagued Korea, including the collapse of department buildings, bridges and most recently the sinking of a ferry holding many young students (Chang, 1999: 49). This sort of growth-first, safety-later approach embodies the very essence of 'compressed modernisation', which can be described as 'for the sake of national development'.

We can trace the sacrificial ethos of national development in South Korea historically, to the post-War period, as Chang mentions. It was formed through a concerted effort by a succession of military dictatorships. The most crucial period in this regard was during the administration of Park Chung-hee from 1963–1979. Under Park, 'the government attempted to change citizens' conduct in their everyday work and life situations so that their conduct would become more compatible with policies geared toward industrialisation'. This was done by connecting 'industrialisation

with collective sentiment' (Sonn and Gimm, 2013: 22). Nationalism, especially for a military dictatorship, provided an important way to 'support the state's moral legitimacy'. Under Park, nationalism was decidedly 'post-colonial', made all the more powerful by the brutal memories of Japanese colonialism. 'True independence' was discursively linked to 'economic growth' (Sonn and Gimm, 2013: 24).

In addition to *ressentiment*, the 'developmentalist governmentality', as Sonn and Gimm call it, consisted of the *Saemaul Undong* ('New Village movement'), which was a nationwide strategy to develop rural communities across South Korea. In their analysis of the movement, Sonn and Gimm persuasively argue that the strategies involved not only organisational and infrastructural reforms (such as the installation of *saemaul* leaders into various communities and also new irrigation systems) but also 'non-economic change' in the form of a 'mental revolution'. The movement was characterised by 'Three Spirits', as they were called: diligence, self-help and cooperation (Sonn and Gimm, 2013: 26–7). In parallel to the Cultural Revolution in China which occurred contemporaneously, the New Village movement required a religious/spiritual transformation among the citizenry. As Sonn and Gimm detail:

> At a more practical level, the mental revolution included abstinence from gambling and moderation in alcohol use; renovation of houses, adoption of work clothes as everyday attire, minimisation and simplification of traditional rituals and ceremonies, practice of family planning; and avoidance of the practice of superstitions such as *goot* (shamanistic prayer ritual) and *dongjae* (collective prayer for the village's guardian deity). (Sonn and Gimm, 2013: 27)

The Saemaul movement required, in effect, a new model of citizen, one which was constituted by the shedding of certain spiritual proclivities in the service of national development. According to Chang, this mode of spiritualised nationalism was dominant until the Asian Financial Crisis of the late 1990s, when there began a 'widespread symptom of South Koreans' withdrawal from economic, familial, and even personal life' (Chang, 1999: 29). Since then, the 'critically limited' nature of development citizenship has revealed itself even more. While on the national level one could say that South Korea has certainly 'recovered' from the crisis of the 1990s, it has, in many ways, been a jobless recovery. The *chaebols* have returned to their prior profit margins largely on the backs of workers. Still, and perhaps increasingly so, more South Koreans are exposed to casual, short contractual jobs and informal self-employment amid the continued decline of essential welfare arrangements such as

social security. The spread of temporary work [*bijeongguijik*] since the late 1990s has buttressed a reactive form of citizenship that becomes entirely framed by national development – in either real or imagined terms.

For Chang, this explains the preponderance of South Korea's social problems. It has the ignoble distinction of having one of the highest suicide rates in the world not to mention the highest *youth* suicide rate in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). In addition, Korean students are some of the most stressed out in the world. The ultracompetitive education system in South Korea has been linked to not only the high suicide rate but also the low fertility rate. South Korea has tried to pass legislation to curb the booming private tutoring industry but has been met with pushback from various sectors, including the shadow education industry (rather expectedly) but also parents. The capital Seoul tried instituting a curfew of 10 p.m. for cram schools (Chandler, 2011). The country has the second longest working hours in the OECD and a labour productivity rating lower than the average of $49 as of 2015 (Ock, 2015). All of these represent attempts at dealing with structural uncertainty through individualised means.

For South Koreans, this situation amounts to a continuation of the spiritualised, nationalist self-orientation, one, which properly recapitulates the 'developmental obsession' of the Park era (Chang, 1999: 30). This obsession, he goes on to state, is a 'path dependent' mentality where the self's existence is attached to that of the state. But, of course, the citizen does not share dividends with equal weight as the conglomerates such as Samsung, Hyundai, and LG that prop up the state. The development citizen's attachment to the state is, instead, simply for the *potential* to 'benefit as private economic players – be they workers, industrialists, or self-employed entrepreneurs – in the market system' (Chang, 1999: 30). National development has thus taken over as the chief duty of the state with the major political parties across the spectrum running campaign pledges to 'revive the economy'. The same can be said for ordinary South Koreans, who 'themselves were not necessarily (neo)liberal or statist, but clearly developmental in hoping that an "economy-first" political regime would augment the conditions of their economic activities' (Chang, 1999: 39).

Although clearly responding to some of the same structural forces, which are commonplace in the discourse on neoliberalism, this mode of development citizenship bears very little evidence of an ideological or intellectual investment in notions of the 'free market' or even 'government scepticism' as so much blowback from neoliberalism in Europe and the United States demonstrates. In contradistinction, South Koreans are beginning 'to appear both helpless and demoted, turning to

various actions of exiting or wishing to exit' the presently constructed circumstances (Chang, 1999: 40). When there is a failure of delivery of sufficient everyday resources for dignified individual existence, there is only going to be national development to fall back on, so to speak.

Being alone

In contemporary South Korea, this failure of resources for dignified existence is evidenced in the phenomena centred around singlehood, or 'being alone'. There are now television shows and reality programs as well as restaurants and bars devoted to being alone. It is a full-blown cultural phenomenon.

Cultural observers within and outside of South Korea have been noting the trend of '*mukbang*', a portmanteau of '*muk*' and '*bang*', which respectively mean 'to eat' and 'to broadcast'. *Mukbang*, or 'eating broadcasts', consist of people live-streaming them eating massive amounts of food on online platforms that allow viewers to donate virtual currency, which can be converted to cash. One of the most famous of these *mukbang* channels is helmed by someone named Park So-Yeon, who goes by the handle The Diva. In a single sitting, she is able to eat four large pizza pies or six pounds of beef.

Western observations of this phenomenon have made note of how many of these 'broadcast jockeys', or 'BJs' as they are called in Korea, make a decent living. The most successful earn as much as 10 million Won (over $8,000) a month. But beyond this, a consistent theme in many observations of *mukbang* has been the rise of 'one-person households' and, as one media member in South Korea noted, 'their ensuing loneliness'. And indeed, this loneliness is acutely felt by Koreans since they '*hate* eating alone'. For Koreans, 'eating is an extremely social, communal activity, which is why even the Korean word for "family" means "those who eat together"' (Cha, 2014). These words, from a media studies professor in Korea, speak to what she believes is the major draw of these eating broadcasts. It is being alone but with others.

Being alone is fast becoming a dominant reality in South Korea. The rise in one-person households or *honjok* is unprecedented. Statistics show that 27 per cent of the households in South Korea are such. This has given rise to a spate of consumer and media trends around being alone. There are now bars for drinking alone known as *honsul*, another portmanteau of '*hon*', which is alone, and '*sul*', which is alcohol. There are restaurants for eating alone, known as *honbap*, with '*bap*' meaning rice, which in Korean is synonymous with 'meal'.

One particular form of eating establishment has gained a deal of attention. Solo dining restaurants, outfitted with cubicles separating individual diners, have popped up. In addition, each cubicle has a chair as well as television and a remote. What these restaurants serve also bears significance. According to one journalistic account, Korean barbecue, 'one of the most social of Korean eating experiences', is, in fact, what many of these restaurants serve. Traditionally, barbecue restaurants in Korea do not serve solo diners, which then underlines the novelty of these newer restaurants.

However, as the journalist who embarked on a dining experience of eating at one of these restaurants relays:

> For some reason, the less pleasant aspects of the barbecue experience seemed amplified: the labour intensity of preparing the meat, the salty aftertaste of each bite, and the oozing greasiness of the pork belly. Despite my cubicle having a fan positioned over my right shoulder, I could almost feel my clothing being saturated with the scent of smouldering pork. (Borowiec, 2017)

Indeed, for the journalist, eating alone was not a way of entrepreneurially improving oneself in concert with the adjusting demands of the market. In fact, for him, the experience resulted less in a feeling of self-expression and enjoyment.

Experts have analysed 'being alone' within the backdrop of a massive change in mood among Korean youth. With very few career prospects and rising unemployment, compounded by low pay and ballooning housing costs in the capital of Seoul, young people are trying defer the responsibilities of family life and work life by having 'me' time. The change comes as Korean youth experience the same bleak feelings about their futures as people in other countries that face similarly high youth unemployment rates, chronic low pay, and expensive housing. But pressure from families and society at large to succeed is particularly gruelling in Korea, and young people are starting to push back against these strict conventions in a serious way – by staying single and seeking more 'me' time. For many, these behaviours represent a bucking of convention. Instead of going to lunch and post-work dinner and drinks with colleagues, young people are choosing autonomy and solitude.

Some social analysts have suggested that this trend amounts to 'stepping gingerly into individualism'. Drinking or eating alone or watching someone eat or drink alone, in the Korean context, amounts to a small way to 'resist the social pressures from the collective' (Steger and Jung, 2017). While this may signal a significant cultural shift, being

alone does not mean 'resistance' necessarily, as singles are now considered to be a new consumer class by businesses, media, and even the government. A website of the Korean Culture and Information Service, which is a part of the Ministry of Sports, Culture and Tourism, actually has tried to leverage this for tourism. A blog post entitled 'Being Alone is Fun' declares:

> Quite often in modern, high-pressure, urban Korea, a lifestyle driven by the so-called 'YOLO' philosophy – an acronym for 'You Only Live Once' – has grown ever more popular, especially among twentysomethings. Young people in a state of YOLO spare no time or money to enjoy their solo time to the fullest, whether it be traveling, dining out or watching a movie by themselves. (Sohn, 2017)

The post goes on to detail the new phenomena already discussed above as well as others such as 'traveling alone' or *honhaeng*. It continues to suggest that all of these new facilities for solo diners and drinkers make 'traveling around Korea alone … great fun' (Sohn, 2017).

The relatively limited starkness of contrast in portrayal between the government's tourism arm and the analytic accounts is clear. On the tourism site, we have the association of being alone with YOLO, a term made popular by the Canadian rapper Drake. But while the North American rapper used the term to signify a carefree, and even hedonistic, attitude toward life, what is clear in the case of South Korea is that YOLO is about getting bang for your buck. Being alone means squeezing out every bit of resource – whether financial or temporal – to spend on one's own enjoyment without the encumbrance of others. The environment of Korea – 'high-pressure' and 'urban' – has necessitated 'being alone'. Rather than signifying the laissez-faire approach to life, YOLO has come to be a means of *surviving*. In fact, a new slang term that has caught on in South Korea is *shibal biyong*, which means 'fuck-it expense', referring to 'an expense that [one] would not have spent if [one] weren't under stress' (Kim, 2019).

Media embody this as well. We can look at the success of the television reality program *I Live Alone* (MBC). Having first aired in 2013, it still releases new episodes as of 2017. Detailing the daily life of celebrities, the show has clear intent, which is to demystify the single life. Undeniably, celebrities in Korea occupy a different social space than ordinary Koreans. What would normally be expected of the average Korean does not apply to them, including the expectations of marriage. The show, therefore, demonstrates how celebrities can lead fulfilling lives on their own. But as

many of the episodes demonstrate, their seemingly meaningful and fun lifestyles are subsidised by their ability to *pay* for them.

For instance, on the 8 June 2018 episode of *I Live Alone*, a singer named Hwasa from the group MAMAMOO made an appearance on the show, during which there was an especially memorable scene that gained an immense amount of popularity. After following her routine from the morning through the evening, the episode moves to a *gopchang* (small intestine, usually beef) restaurant, where Hwasa proceeds to eat two servings by herself. The scene of her eating alone but with gusto 'gained much attention', with reports of the dish becoming popular across the country (Anon, 2018). But what is not reported is the price of *gopchang*, which is more expensive than regular meat, according to some sources in South Korea (Anon, n.d.). Hwasa's ability to eat alone, and so excitedly, hinges on her ability to pay for two servings.

There is also the television drama called *Drinking Solo* (TVN), which portrays various people from all spheres of society who share the common trait of dealing with the stresses of life by drinking alone. A representative from the production company of the television program stated, 'As *honjok* [single people] and single-person households increase, there are more and more programs showing how singles live. People feel comfort and laughter when they see people like themselves on TV' (Steger and Jung, 2017). Like *I Live Alone*, *Drinking Solo* functions not only to normalise being alone but also to achieve identification. In normalising being alone, we can say that a new 'citizen-subject' emerges, one that stands alone amid decreasing resources for existence. As life becomes increasingly more difficult, the ego-ideal is that which is represented through media and consumer culture – it is the solo Korean citizen-subject, the *honjok*, that does not truly stand alone but rather atomised. It is this solo subject that lives with the contradiction of being one of a nation-full of *honjok*. In this way, it is not autonomy in the sense of a volitional standing apart. But rather it is the forced isolation of the development citizen.

The phenomenon of 'being alone' in South Korea has arguably reasserted what Christopher Lasch decades ago described as a 'culture of narcissism' (Lasch, 1991). For Lasch, narcissism, as a cultural condition, came out of a void left by religion, which was subsequently filled up by, in Philip Rieff's terms, a 'therapeutic sensibility' (1987). People were craving personal salvation rather than membership in a community, which the religion of old, the counter of 'therapy', provided. With the rise of a therapeutic sensibility came a different set of priorities – feeling, a sense of personal well-being and psychic security (Lasch, 1991: 7).

To consider the political theology of compressed modernity is to take seriously the subjectivities engendered by it, and thus it means taking into account its differences with (neo-)liberal (post-)modernity of the West. As the socio-historical basis of Lasch's argument reminds us, this turn to the self had emerged out of a specific set of social conditions in the 1970s and 1980s, which he described as 'the crisis of confidence'. In the era of 'trickle-down economics' and the 'end of society', capitalist societies and Western culture more broadly had encouraged a 'survival mentality'. Instead of dreaming of overcoming difficulties, people wished to merely survive them (Lasch, 1991: 49). Narcissism, then, was the logical response to a world perceived as both dangerous and forbidding. It was an ethos that emerged from the belief that society has not future; thus, mind as well take care of ourselves. Self-preservation had replaced self-improvement. The Protestant work ethic, the political theology of capitalist modernity, which had secularised specific aspects of the Calvinist *certitudo salutis*, had turned into an ethic of personal survival (Lasch, 1991: 53). It is what Rieff would describe as 'morality without faith' and 'culture without a cultus' (Rieff, 1987: 15). The political theology of compressed modernity has achieved similar results but retaining the nation in the form of development. After all, eating and drinking solo, watching young women eat a table full of food, or seeing celebrities on television living happy single lives, are all means of therapy, defined as the respite from the everyday. While Rieff famously argued that the therapeutic was precisely 'anti-religion' because it did not require sublimation, that is, a renunciation of some kind for some greater good, and a commitment to that good, it seems that 'being alone' as a cultural phenomenon gives evidence to an accomplishment of the therapeutic with the retention of the collective in the form of the developmental nation – a wrinkle no doubt attributable to the compressed nature of modernity in South Korea.

Notes

1 Transcendence, sacrifice, and aspiration: the political theology of development in Asia

1 Intellectual conversations about the status of 'the political' are flourishing within contemporary political theory (see Dillon and Shapiro, 2007; Wiley, 2016; Postero and Elinoff, 2019). While these studies scrutinise historically competing theorisations of the concept of politics, in this volume we focus more specifically on political theology.

2 The demarcation of 'politics' from 'the political' reflects the metaphysical distinction between 'ontic' and 'ontology' (see e.g. Marchart, 2007).

3 On the concept of devaraja and pre-modern imaginations of the state in India and Southeast Asia, see also Coedès (1968) and Kulke (1978).

4 Much of this work has been carried out together with colleagues in the National University of Singapore's Asia Research Institute. Key publications include: Fountain et al. (2015); Wu and Feener (2015); Fountain et al. (2016); Scheer et al. (2018); and Borchert et al. (2020).

5 Weddle does, on the penultimate page of his book (2017: 209), concede that 'The positive value of sacrifice as a *moral* ideal is that it encourages individuals to forfeit personal interests for the common good', [emphasis in original]. The emphasis on the dangerous tendency of sacrifice to foster violence is at the center of his broader argument.

6 On recognising the simultaneously multi-vectored dynamics involved, see: R.M. Feener and Wu K., 'The Ethics of Religious Giving in Asia', *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 35.1 (2020).

7 The metaphysical and political importance of royal, Indo-Buddhist symbolism is historically such that even minority religious traditions in Thailand have incorporated King Bhumibol's *theos* through processes of doctrinal indigenisation and re-adaptation. On the 'Thaification' of Catholicism, for example, see Bolotta (2017b, 2018).

8 On development and humanitarian things, see: Collier et al. (2018), Hull (2012), and Smirl (2015). On materiality and religion, see especially: Meyer and Houtman (2012), and Bautista (2012). For a study that combines both development and religious materialities, see Fountain's (2014) analysis of Mennonite canned meat, which traces the 'theological life of things' as they circulate within transnational aid chains.

2 East of Westphalia: shaping the body-politic via institutional charisma

1 This critical perspective owes decisively to Marshall Hodgson (1974), a main inspirer of the sociology of Islam project (Salvatore 2016).
2 This is also visible on the cover of Darling 2013, where Atatürk postures as responsive to the grievances of the people in a way that mimics Sultan Sanjar (1085–1157) many centuries earlier.

3 The yogic ethic and the spirit of development

1 See Patrick McCartney, '"International Day of Yoga" Will not Solve Climate Change. Here's Why', published online at The Wire (12 June 2019): https://thewire.in/environment/international-day-of-yoga-will-not-solve-climate-change-heres-why.
2 Examples from Jamison and Brereton (2014) where yoga means 'war' are found in1.5.3; 1.30.7; 4.24.4; 5.37.5; 7.54.3; 7.86.8; 10.89.10; 10.166.5). For the original text in Sanskrit, see Nooten and Holland (1994).
3 Our concept of the political here owes some inspiration to the work of political theorist Chantal Mouffe (2005), as well as Adorno's (1992) idea of negative dialectics. For a discussion of Mouffe, Laclau and others, see Wiley (2016).
4 For the dating of the 'Yoga Sutras', known as *Pātañjala Yogaśāstra* more commonly in Sanskrit, we follow Maas (2006; see also Maas 2016).
5 See C. Marrewa-Karwoski's essay, '"Hindu by Birth, Muslim by Wisdon": The Roots of Yogi Adityanath's Cult Group', 13 April 2017 on *Quartz* (online): https://qz.com/india/956445/hindu-by-birth-muslim-by-wisdom-the-roots-of-yogi-adityanaths-cult-group/
6 The *Kaṭha Upanishad* (c. third century BCE) does use the term yoga to describe a way to 'defeat even death', and contains a rudimentary understanding of the subtle spiritual body of yoga, as well as techniques of breathing and concentration, but it contains neither the breadth nor the philosophical sophistication of the *Gītā*. And the next such text after the *Gītā* that fully engages with yoga as a concept, the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali, appears some 400–500 years or so after the *Gītā* in the fourth century CE (Maas 2016). The yoga Patanjali teaches is quite different from that of the *Gītā*, though it will form the bedrock of the yoga

we know today, that yoga of positions, of quieting the mind, and of attaining a physio-spiritual goal – 'ceasing the turning of thought' as Patanjali says.

7 For a comprehensive account of the presentation of yoga as psychophysical practice in the *Bhagavad Gītā*, see Mallinson and Singleton, 2017.

8 Mallinson and Singleton, 2017: 17.

9 Edwin Arnold published his text in 1885. This was the text read by most nationalists who took the Gītā into prison with them as few could read Sanskrit.

10 The translation into Gujarati would appear in 1929. His commentary, a series of public talks, began appearing in 1926, and include his 'Anasaktiyoga' introductory essay in 1930.

11 As a note of historical interest, we might also point out that many Indian nationalists found common ground with German Nationalism along the old adage, 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend'. Gandhi wrote two letters to Hitler, in 1939 and 1940, and though he called Hitler a 'friend', and spoke warmly of Mussolini, Gandhi urged both men to avoid war.

12 The *Gītā* verse is II.39, which Gandhi translates in this way: 'Thus have I set before thee the attitude of Knowledge; hear now the attitude of Action; resorting to this attitude thou shalt cast off the bondage of action.' The letters are from 19–20 March 1926. See Gandhi (1969), Volume 34: 97.

13 Portions of this section draws from a public essay that first appeared in an online magazine (Kale and Novetzke, 2016).

4 Managing Karbala: genealogies of Shi'a humanitarianism in Pakistan, England, and Iraq

1 This chapter is based on fieldwork conducted in Pakistan in 2015 and in England 2014–15, as well as on continuing interaction (phone, e-mail) with representatives of the NGOs under study since 2012. I have used pseudonyms in place of my interlocutors' real names in order to protect their identities. For comments on earlier versions of this chapter I would like to express my gratitude to the editors and to Brook Bolander and Brian Donahoe.

2 In the following, I will focus exclusively on Twelver Shia Islam, which is by far the largest denomination within Shia Islam. For the reader's convenience, I will use to the shorthand 'Shia' throughout the chapter, but always with reference to the specificity of Twelver Shia actors and contexts.

3 It is worth noting that the Latin-Greek hybrid term 'merito-cracy' itself is a creation of the twentieth century. While now prevalent in various managerial and political formations around the world, the term was coined half a century ago by Michael Young in the context of his sociological satire *The Rise of the Meritocracy* (1961 [1958]), in which he takes the role of a narrator who looks back in history from the year 2034. Young depicts a dystopian society that has fully embraced calculative merit in its mechanics of rule and is thus predestined for destruction.

5 From blood, cast in cement: materialising the political in Thailand

1 De Vries (2006) offers a more sustained exploration of the conceptual origins of the term.

2 Walter Benjamin offers another answer to this question, considering violence to be at the 'rotten' center of law (1978: 286). He juxtaposes mythic and divine violence to show the underlying rationale for law-making and law-destroying violence. Such a reading hovers uncomfortably over the political theologies literature, compelling us to consider both how the transcendent transforms into bodily injury and how bodily injury becomes recast as the transcendent politics.

3 In the slightly longer term, the Red Shirts formed an encampment that, though violently dispersed, has had deep effects on people's political sensibilities. The PDRC's obstruction of elections and mobilisation of moral politics was critical in bringing about the 2014 coup, which has been fundamental to the refashioning of governance ever since.

4 Peircian semiotics emphasises the open and productive relationship between signs and objects of signification. Drawing from the Peircian notion of the *qualisign,* Nancy Munn (1986), Webb Keane (2003; 2005) and others (Fehérváry, 2012: 203; Jones, 2013) argue that qualities of sensation inhere themselves onto materials embedding histories, ideologies, and meanings into materiality itself. The history of concrete and various interpretations of that history are thus inhered in its materiality whether the user of particular symbols intends for them to be mobilised in a particular way or not. Of course, certain actions can direct attention in particular way, but Peircian semiotics points us toward thinking about how signs are in fact constituted through social processes and productive of new signs via what he called the 'outward clash' in the world (Keane, 2003: 413–14).

5 I follow Hankins and Yeh who describe commensuration as 'a fundamental psychosocial practice implicated in the most basic human acts of classification, commensuration involves the adequation of objects taken in the first instance as distinct in nature. It hinges on judgments of similarity in the face of essential difference, the two held in tension with each other and yet of a piece, and it is, thus, wrapped up in the production of borders and boundaries of all sorts' (2016: 7). As Holston (2008) notes, claims of equal citizenship are also claims of commensuration of being.

6 Radio France International, 'Blood Protest at Parliament Symbolic Sacrifice', available at: http://en.rfi.fr/asia-pacific/20100316-blood-protest-parliament-symbolic-sacrifice.

7 Al-Jazeera. 'Thailand's Red Shirts in Blood Protest', available at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=iXQ7LPUXGMk&t=1s.

8 Available at: www.theguardian.com/world/2010/mar/16/thailand-protesters-blood-government.

9 Such interpretations were common in the media as well, available at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/8574225.stm.

10 The relation between the color red, blood, and the nation was replicated in the uniforms of the Village Scouts described by Katherine Bowie (1997: 222)
11 There are important further resonances between Thongchai Winichakul (1994) notion of the 'geo-body' of the nation, which transforms the territory of the nation into a physical sort of body, the rendering of the political body described here, and the embodied quality of this hierarchy as described by scholars like Felicity Aulino (2014).
12 Thai citizenship laws are premised on a combination of *jus soli* and *jus sangunis* principles, the former reflecting birthplace and the second reflecting the nationality of a child's parentage. These laws are quite complex in their actual enactment and so are beyond the scope of this argument.
13 The protests were eventually relocated to Lumphini Park and continued for another three months until the Thai military took over the government with a coup, launched on 22 May 2014.
14 Available at: www.aljazeera.com/news/asia-pacific/2014/02/protesters-surround-thai-government-house-201421751444165334.html.
15 Exceptions here are Chua (2012), Phorphant (2008; 2015), and Elinoff (2017).
16 George (2016) and others (DeTemple, 2012; Fehérváry, 2013; Harvey and Knox, 2015) have pointed out the diverse ways concrete functions within developmental discourses.
17 For a distilled version of this idea see David Streckfuss (2014).
18 Available at: www.reuters.com/article/us-thailand-plaque-idUSKBN17H044.
19 In response to the removal, activists created replicas of the old plaque, distributing them as t-shirts, key chains and other bric-a-brac. In this way, the repaving of history was contested as thousands now held the previous plaque and its inscription in their homes and on their bodies.

6 The theopolitics of art: Qur'anic objects and their publics in Indonesia

1 I thank Giuseppe Bolotta, R. Michael Feener, and Philip Fountain for inviting me to take part in their workshop on 'Political Theologies and Development in Asia' at the Asia Research Institute, Singapore, in February 2017. Their critical feedback, along with comments from workshop participants Eli Elinoff, Peter Jackson, Sunila Kale, and Christian Novetzke helped me groom this chapter in innumerable ways. Niloofar Haeri, Anthony Lovenheim Irwin, and Matt Tomlinson also offered incisive and supportive remarks as I redrafted the chapter. I am grateful for their insights and suggestions.
2 The very idea of 'Islamic art', argue Sheila Blair and Jonathan Bloom (2003), is a product of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Western scholarship. See George (2012a) for an overview of 'Southeast Asian Islamic art.'
3 See, for example, Flood (2013), Keane (2009), and Plate (2006).

4 Compare, here, the notion of the 'interpretive community' as developed by Stanley Fish (1980). For Fish, members of an interpretive community have common purposes and goals and, thus, common ground in the making of texts and commentaries. There are dangers in presuming the homogeneity of interpretive practice in such a community. We should expect to encounter diverse interpretive perspectives, motivations, anxieties and strategies among members, and clashes of ideological outlook, but commonalities are crucial. The virtue of a coherent body of interpretative purposes and strategies is that it gives a community a common and therefore contestable culture.

5 Tamen suggests that this 'society of friends' requires a language, or a set of language games, that will afford a degree of intersubjective accord as well as the intersubjective space in which 'the friends' may understand or misunderstand one another (2010: 3). He remarks that this putative language must be one that is 'common both to the objects one makes speak and to one's own language' (2010: 134).

6 See, too, the work of Graham Harman (2002; 2005) for ways to rethink the 'political' around things.

7 A similar sensibility informs recent ethnographies (e.g., Bear, 2015; Harvey and Knox, 2015) that view infrastructure (such as roads, waterways, and state debt and development) as a public object made from and sustaining ethicopolitical life.

8 The question of a location's 'neutrality' and 'isolation' is, of course, problematic. Neutrality and isolation would seem to involve exclusions of some kind.

9 Latour (2005a: 15–16) remarks that that political science and political philosophy have been mute on the problem of things. The latter, he says, 'has often been the victim of a strong object-avoidance tendency'.

10 Drawing from both phenomenology and pragmatism, anthropologists such as Tim Ingold (2006), Michael Jackson (1998), Bruno Latour (2005b), and Yael Navarro-Yashin (2009) have insisted on our need to recognise our intersubjective relations with material and natural things. For key statements and revealing studies in the anthropological study of materiality, see: Appadurai (1986 and 2006); Gell (1998); Hoskins (1998 and 2006); Keane (2003); Miller (2005 and 2008); Myers (2001); and Tilley et al. (2006). The 'material turn' in anthropology also fits congenially with the arrival of 'thing theory' in literary and cultural studies (e.g., Ahmed, 2006; Brown, 2001; Felski, 2007; Plotz, 2005), and in visual cultural studies, where W. J. T. Mitchell (2005) has asked, 'What do pictures want?'

11 See, for example: Bautista (2012); Davis (1997); Keane (2007); Morgan (1998, 2010b); and Myer and Houtman (2012).

12 There appears to be a mild aversion among 'object-oriented' religious scholars toward the political. For example, Morgan (2010b: 72) writes: 'There is the politics of things, their inflection within social fields, and there is the poetics of things … It is important not to collapse the poetics of things into their politics if we are to be able to discern their materiality and human corporeality.'

13 See broad and critical discussions of such theorisation in de Vries (2006) and Mendieta and VanAntwerpen (2011).

14 Political philosophy usually treats the individual – even in the guise of the citizen –as an unproblematic, undivided whole, ignoring the fractures, contradictions, and internalised voices of others that make up a self or that must enter into self-creation. Similarly, religious groups are often treated as homogenous tribes of thought and attachment, rather than as diverse collectivities.

15 See for example, the discussion between Judith Butler, Craig Calhoun, Jürgen Habermas, Charles Taylor, and Cornell West in Mendieta and Van Antwerpen (2011: 109–34).

16 Globalisation has complicated, and makes increasingly untenable, durable demarcations of public and private within the sphere of the nation-state. The nation-state has porous borders. Social media networks and digital surveillance – the latter typically conducted in secret and justified as a form of security for sovereign states, or as a form of market analysis – have been particularly key in distending 'publics of belonging' beyond the borders of the nation-state. Globalised forms of belonging lead Armando Salvatore (2007) to posit an 'exit from a Westphalian framing of political space and the emergence of a transnational Islamic public'; and Richard Haass to sketch the sovereign obligation of states to individuals and states beyond their borders (2016). The world of things is porous, too, and we can expect the life of things to disturb neat demarcations of public and private. The recent wave of ethnonationalism and economic protectionism in 2016 – Brexit and the political ascendancy of Donald Trump in the Anglophone West – are in reaction to the changes in publics of belonging.

17 See Mitchell's 'Showing Seeing' (2005: 336–56) for the difficulties and critical import of looking at looking, of 'seeing what seeing is'.

18 Among Indonesia's foremost challenges in the early independence period was its aim to integrate the diversity of ethnolinguistic groups and to forestall ethnoreligious conflict. Sectarian conflict remains a serious concern. High levels of immigration are the source of much pluralism in European nation-states; not so in Indonesia, which attracts but a few immigrants.

19 For a detailed account of the *mushaf* project and its cultural politics, see George (1998).

20 It could probably go without saying that Indonesia's Christian communities were unsettled by the regime's embrace of arts aligned with Islam.

21 Compare my depiction of the 'artist-citizen' to Richard Rorty's (1989) notion of the poet-citizen's role in the public sphere of liberal democracy, where the poet-citizen is a self-creating exemplar of freedom and autonomy. As I point out in *Picturing Islam* (George, 2010), the postcolonial context obliged Pirous and his cohort of friends to be exemplars of national spirit and religiosity.

22 Sjadzali also objected to the verse layout in H. B. Jassin's *The Poetic Qur'an* (Keane, 2018)

23 The Istiqal Mosque itself was sometimes an object of controversy and anxiety for Muslims, for it had been designed by a Christian architect, F. Silaban. There were suspicions that Christian symbols had been incorporated into the building's architecture.

24 For a detailed account of the controversy and its cultural politics, see George (2009).
25 See 'Claudia Schiffer in Satanic Dress by Karl Lagerfeld', available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=EJyxAB8YRfY. Accessed 18 August 2019.
26 See Leaman (2006) and his discussion of *laghw* and *lahw* (idle and distracting).
27 See Ahmed (2006); Hoskins (1998, 2006); Miller (2008); and Navarro-Yashin (2009) for suggestive insights into the life of things in contemporary life-worlds.
28 For important recent work on iconoclasm, see Latour and Weibel (2002) and Mitchell (1992; 2005). See too, Peter van der Veer on the 'social death' of things (2016: 80–106).

7 Embodying the late King: Buddhist salvation and the sacrifice of sovereignty at a Bangkok mall

1 In Thai grammar, individuals who embody extraordinary quantities of Dharma, like Buddhist monks, are categorised with the classifier of '*rup*' – *simulacrum*. This highlights commonalities with the model proposed by Kantorowicz (1997), which posits Christian kings as terrestrial *simulacra* of the divine.
2 Gods in the Thai Buddhist cosmos are not eternal. Although their stay in the heavenly realms may appear to be infinite from a human perspective, it is bound to the expiry date of their reservoir of merit.
3 The term '*siwilai*', from 'civilised', was used for the first time by King Mongkut (r. 1851–1868) in his coronation speech (Stengs, 2009: 68). His successor, King Chulalongkorn (r. 1868–1910), is worshipped to this day as the 'great moderniser' (2009).
4 The Five Precepts form the most basic code of conduct that Thai Buddhist laypeople are encouraged to undertake. They are: abstention from killing, abstention from stealing, abstention from sexual misconduct, abstention from falsehood, and abstention from intoxication.
5 King Maha Vajiralongkorn's ascension was declared 'retroactive' to 13 October 2016, deleting Thailand's period without a king from the official records.

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Index

Note: 'n.' after a page reference indicates the number of a note on that page

Adorno, Theodor 134 n.3
Afghanistan 38
Africa 17, 57, 61
Agamben, Giorgio 2, 21, 69, 113
agriculture 109
agnostic 46
'Alid piety 29
America *see* United States
Amnesty International 10
anthropology 26, 74, 90–1, 123–4, 138 n.10
Antioch 14
Arditi, Benjamin 3
Arendt, Hannah 88, 90
Asad, Talal 55–6, 120–3
Asia 1–17, 18–20, 25, 35–7, 52–3, 57, 61–2, 64, 99
  Central 7, 17, 34, 38, 63
  East 10, 14, 42, 45, 119–20, 123–4
  pre-modern 5–6, 109
  South 7, 17, 63, 109
  Southeast 5–6, 11, 14–16, 37, 42, 45, 105, 109–10, 133 n.3, 137 n.2
  Western 7, 17, 22, 25–8, 61, 63
Asian Financial Crisis 125
Asian values 14
aspiration 3, 8–11, 13–14, 46, 58, 63, 78, 88, 91, 96, 106
  and salvation 2, 9–10, 14, 17, 94, 102, 112, 116–17, 131
atheists 46
Atia, Mona 17, 56, 61

Bakhtin, Mikhail 3
Barnett, Michael 9
Benjamin, Walter 135 n.2
Bennett, Jane 71, 85, 89–90, 103
Bhagavad Gītā 45, 48, 50–1, 134 n.7
Bhumibol, Adulyadej (King of Thailand) 15–16, 80, 104–6, 108–16, 118, 133 n.6
blood 12, 16, 22, 65, 70–9, 81–6, 123, 136 n.6–10
body-politic 3, 26–7, 29, 32, 35
Bolotta, Giuseppe 5, 12, 14, 71, 117, 133 n.6
Bornstein, Erica 14
Buddhism 5–6, 10, 13–16, 42, 45–6, 57, 71, 75–6, 81, 86, 104–9, 111–17, 133 n.1, 6, 140 n.1, 2, 4
  socially engaged 5
  Theravada 73, 82, 116
bureaucracy 20, 32, 68, 93, 107
bureaucratisation 24, 29–30, 34
bureaucrats 11

Central Asia *see* Asia, Central
charisma 7, 24–35, 37–8
  Indo-Buddhist 81
  royal 81–2
  saintly 7, 29, 32, 34
charity 17, 33–4, 56, 58–62, 64–7
China 10, 22, 25, 36, 58, 112, 123, 126
Christendom 4, 26
Christian(ity) 1, 4–7, 9, 11, 13–14, 27, 43, 46, 55, 57, 59, 61, 66, 117, 139 n.20, 23
  Catholic 75, 133 n.6
  Europe 2, 4, 25, 106
  evangelical 14
  Judeo-Christian 6, 13, 51
  Latin 6–7, 26, 28, 36
  medieval 6, 75, 104, 107–8, 140 n.1
  Occidental 20, 71
  Orthodox 37
  Protestant 15, 112, 132
citizenship 84, 119–27, 136 n.5, 137 n.12
civilisation 3, 22, 109
climate change 10, 40, 134 n.1
Cold War 80, 109, 110, 112, 114, 115
colonialism 5–8, 17, 20, 24, 28–9, 34–7, 39, 47, 50–2, 54, 109
concrete 16, 70–2, 78–84, 86, 136 n.4, 137 n16
consumerism 115, 117
corporation 22, 26, 33
cosmologies 5, 15, 36, 114
  Abrahamic 6
  developmental 10, 105
  galactic/mandalic 6
  Greco-Roman 6
  Indic 6, 15, 105, 109, 115–17
  Islamic 6, 30
  Judeo-Christian 107
  millennial 4
Crockett, Clayton 121–2
Crush, Jonathan 9

De Vries, Hent 3, 71, 85, 135 n.1, 138 n.13
death 2, 12, 13, 44–6, 104–6, 110–11, 115–16, 134 n.6, 140 n.28
democracy 5, 15, 21, 44, 69, 70, 72–5, 78, 82–4, 89, 93, 104, 106, 113, 125, 139 n.21
demos 3, 21
devarāja 6, 133 n.3
development
  East Asian miracle 14
  global flows 6
  organisations 6
  priesthood 11
  and religion 8, 133 n.7
  teleology 13, 44
  transnational networks 8, 58, 60, 66, 94, 100, 124, 133 n.7
  Western-style 7, 52
developmentalism 8, 52, 53, 54, 72, 82, 123–4
Devji, Faisal 53
Dhammakaya Temple 14
dhammarāja 6, 81
Dharma 5, 6, 14, 50, 81, 104, 107–8, 110, 113, 140 n.1
Dirlik, Arif 123–4
divinity 13, 105, 107, 109–10, 112, 114
Duara, Prasenjit 5, 25, 36, 48

East Asia *see* Asia, East
ecumene 4, 7, 19, 26, 35, 39
economy 20, 28, 34, 40, 42, 49, 50, 54, 57, 61, 71–2, 80, 94, 105, 110, 122–7, 132, 139 n.16
  moral 59
  neoliberal 4, 13, 67, 120
  occult 17, 62
  political 20, 52, 79–80, 82
  sufficiency (*setachid pho phieng*) 16, 109, 112, 117
England 58–9, 66, 135 n.1
Enlightenment 1, 41, 47, 53
  political theory 1
  rationality 2
entanglements
  non-linear, multi-vectored 4, 7, 17, 66
  between religion and development 4, 9

between religion and politics 4, 9
trans-confessional 5
eschatology 13
ethics 14–16, 46, 48, 66, 89, 92, 100–1, 124
etymology 4
Europe 4–6, 18, 20, 22, 29, 36–8, 53, 57, 61, 63, 120, 127
Christianity in 106
Euro-America 4
medieval 5, 25
exception 22, 37, 51, 77
state of 2, 69

faith 3, 10, 56, 91, 96–7, 99, 124, 132
Fassin, Didier 11–12, 55, 59, 65–6, 75
fear 3, 46–7, 49, 91, 101
Feener, R. Michael 6, 9, 10, 15, 71, 109, 133 n.4
Ferguson, James 13
Foucault, Michel 44, 55
Fountain, Philip 6, 9, 10, 56, 71, 109–10, 133 n.4, 7
Freud, Sigmund 3

Gandhi, Mahatma 15, 43, 45, 47–54, 135 n.11, 12
Gaza 61
Geertz, Clifford 6, 117
Germany 38, 43, 66, 99, 135 n.11
ghosts 107
God(s) 2–3, 6, 12–14, 29, 34, 46, 71, 76, 91, 96, 100, 104–6, 108, 111, 113, 116
Golden City 13, 110–17
Goodchild, Philip 17, 62, 112
governance 4, 13, 17, 29, 32, 36, 47, 84, 91, 93, 136 n.3
Gray, Christine 16, 81–2, 106, 112, 114

Habermas, Jürgen 89, 139 n.15
Harris, Ian 15
heaven 6, 30–1, 104–5, 107–8, 110, 113, 116
Hegel, Georg 43–4
Heidegger, Martin 55, 89
Hinduism 6, 15, 46–7, 54, 59, 61, 71, 107, 134 n.5
historiography 4–5, 66
Occidental 5
Thai 109
history 1–4, 6–9, 13, 15, 17, 18–20, 28, 30, 34, 36, 42–3, 46, 48, 54, 55–9, 63–6, 68, 70–3, 76–7, 79–86, 94, 106, 109, 112, 117, 120–3, 125, 132, 133 n.1, 6, 135 n.11, 3, 136 n.4, 137 n.19
hierarchy 5, 24, 31, 53, 72, 77, 82–4, 105, 107, 112–13, 136–7 n.11
Hobbes, Thomas 27, 38–9
homini sacri 2
human rights 3, 10
humanitarianism 10–13, 16–17, 55–9, 62–7, 133 n.7
Hussein, Saddam 63, 66

Ibn Khaldun 32–3, 35
imperialism 32, 34
confessional 5
European 6, 9
see also colonialism
India 6–7, 12, 14, 22, 30, 40–5, 47–51, 53–4, 61–3, 133 n.3, 134 n.5, 135 n.11
indigenous 6
indigenisation 133 n.6
Indonesia 4, 12, 14, 16, 61, 87, 92–4, 98–100, 102, 124, 139 n.18
industrialisation 10, 40–1, 50, 52, 80, 120, 125, 127
International Monetary Fund (IMF) 10, 125
Iraq 55, 61, 63–6
Islam 14, 16, 18–20, 24–5, 27, 29, 32–33, 47, 57–9, 61–3, 65, 87–8, 91, 93–4, 96, 98, 100–2, 134 n.2, 139 n.20–1
political 5, 42
Shari'a 24
Shia (Twelver) 13, 55–67, 135 n.2
Sufi 6, 23, 29, 31–4, 42
Sunni 29, 57, 61–2, 92

Islamicate 17–24, 26–9, 31, 33, 35–6, 39
Italy 38

Jainism 46
James, Henry 11
Japan 36–7, 66, 124–6

Kant, Immanuel 43
Kantorowicz, Ernst 5, 26, 106, 108, 140 n.1
Karbala, Battle of 58, 63–4, 66
Keane, Webb 71, 83–4, 136 n.4, 137 n.3, 138 n.10–11, 139 n.22
Keyes, Charles 5, 15, 107
Khan, Paul 3
king 6, 13, 76, 85, 140 n.5
  Buddhist 6, 13, 107–8, 104–5, 108–18, 133 n.6
  Christian 107, 140 n.1
  as conqueror 6
  of development 15, 80–1, 108–18, 140 n.3
  God 6, 108–18
  Mughal 30, 42, 47
  renouncer 6, 114
  sacral 6, 16
  two bodies 5–6, 26, 30–1, 106–7
kingdoms 6, 64, 76, 104, 109, 111, 113
Korea, Republic of 4, 12, 14, 119–20, 123–32
Kyoto Protocol 40

Laclau, Ernesto 2, 134 n.3
Latour, Bruno 89–90, 138 n.9–10, 140 n.28
law 5, 33, 68, 75, 84–5, 135–6 n.2
  citizenship 137 n.12
  dynastic 30
  Islamic 59, 60, 93
  law giver 32
  modern 74
  natural 81, 107
  Roman 2, 26
  state (constitutional) 21, 27, 39, 68, 82
Lebanon 61
Lee Kuan Yew 4
Lefort, Claude 1–3, 68, 85
Leviathan 7, 19, 25, 27, 30–3, 36, 38–9
life 2–3, 5, 9, 12, 21–2, 42, 47, 56, 62, 65–6, 88, 90, 103, 108, 120, 125–6, 129–31, 139 n.16, 140 n.27
  mundane 46–7
  political 17, 91–2, 138 n.7
  politics of 11
  public 89, 93
  religious 92, 133 n.7
  social 17, 71, 111

Mahmood, Saba 37–9, 88, 92
market 3, 13–14, 80–1, 120, 124, 127, 129, 139 n.16
martyr(dom) 11, 64
Marx, Karl 43
material(ity) 16–17, 19, 24, 45, 47–9, 54, 65, 68–72, 74–6, 78–80, 83–9, 90–4, 97, 101–2, 111, 123, 138 n.10
media 10, 16, 73, 79, 100–1, 106, 114–15, 119–20, 128, 130–1, 136 n.9, 139 n.16
Melville, Herman 11
meritocracy 13, 58, 60–1, 135 n.3
Middle East *see* Asia, Western
military 42, 47, 125–6
  hero 26
  rule 29, 80, 125
  Thai 13, 15–16, 72, 79–80, 104, 106, 111, 113–15, 118, 137 n.13
Milner, Anthony 6
missionaries 9
Mitchell, Timothy 11, 69, 103, 138 n.10, 140 n.28
Mizruchi, Susan 11
modernity 4, 7, 11, 17, 18, 20, 29, 31–3, 72–3, 119–21, 132
  Asian 15–16, 25
  compressed modernity 10, 119, 120, 124, 125, 132

multiple modernities 25, 35–6, 39
secular 103
western 1–2, 7, 43, 53, 57, 125
Modi, Narendra Damodardas 7, 40, 48, 54
Molnar, Thomas 4
monarchy 15, 30, 76–7, 79, 81–3, 85
see also king; kingdoms
Mouffe, Chantal 2, 85, 134 n.3
Mughals 29, 30, 42, 47
mukbang 120, 128

nation-state 3, 8, 12, 36, 49, 51–4, 58, 63–4, 66, 69, 72–3, 76, 78, 83–5, 92, 96–7, 104, 114–15, 117, 119–22, 124, 131–2, 136 n.10–11, 139 n.16
governance 13
nationalism 10, 27, 37–8, 49, 54, 66, 76–7, 82, 119, 121, 123–4, 126, 135 n.11
sovereignty 2, 15, 27–9
Nehru, Pandit Jawaharlal 50, 52, 54
Nelson, Robert 11
neoliberal 62, 67, 120–1
capitalism 4, 13
culture 58, 62
globalisation 120
pious neoliberalism 17
see also economy; meritocracy
New Creation Church 14
NGOs 6, 9, 14, 56, 135 n.1
Nietzsche, Friedrich 43, 55
Nuijten, Monique 13

ontologies 2, 7, 19–21, 24–6, 46, 62, 73, 133 n.2
Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) 127
Ottomans 30–9

Pakistan 13, 55, 57–61, 63, 66, 91, 135 n.1
Park Chung-Hee 125–8
people 13, 21, 27, 38, 76, 105
'good people' 82, 85
see also demos
People's Action Party 11
Persia 6, 30
philanthropy 14, 56, 62, 65
political theology
and aesthetics 3, 16, 71, 74, 88, 93–4, 100–1
and death 2, 12–13, 44–6, 104–7, 110–11, 115–16, 134 n.6
de-centred 7, 17, 20
and desire 3, 47, 54, 72, 93
and emotions 3, 122, 124
Eurocentric 1–5
and fear 3, 46, 91
and hope 3, 13, 60, 91, 122
Latin-American 5
and life 2–3, 9, 11–12, 17, 42, 46–7, 56, 62, 66, 88–93, 103, 120, 130
post-colonial 6–7, 17, 24, 37
the political 2, 4, 41, 51, 57, 60, 63, 68–72, 74–5, 79, 82–6, 102, 133 n.1–2, 134 n.3, 138 n.12
and seduction 3
and unconsciousness 3, 84
of yoga 7, 48–54
see also cosmologies; development; humanitarianism; material(ity); king
politics
of life 11
of suffering and compassion 11
priesthood 11
progress 12, 15, 19, 36, 72, 94, 109–10, 115
prosperity 13–14, 17, 44, 86, 104, 109–12, 117
protest 16, 57, 72–9, 82–4, 99–100, 136 n.6–7
public sphere 17, 87, 89–90, 92, 94, 96, 102, 139 n.21

Qur'an 12, 16, 87, 92–9, 101

Red Shirts 12, 70, 72–5
Redfield, Peter 12

religion
and capitalism 14, 17, 58–60, 112, 121
and development 4–5, 8–10, 16–17, 36, 44, 124
genealogies 4, 7, 13, 57–8, 64–5
giving 14, 58–63, 65, 67
and materiality 90–2, 98, 101–3, 133 n.7
and medicine 47, 131
and politics 2, 4–5, 8, 19, 27, 29, 31, 39, 42, 44, 91–2, 121–3
religiopolitical (nexus) 7, 17–20, 23, 27–30, 35
Rg Veda 7, 41–2, 44–6
rituals 3, 11, 22–3, 81–2, 112, 116, 122, 126
political 78
prayer 126
purificatory 62
Rorty, Richard 91
Rostow, Walt 14
Rudnyickj, Daromir 124

sacralisation 17, 20–4, 26, 30
sacred 2–4, 12, 16, 48, 75, 84, 90, 102–3
sacrifice 2–3, 8–9, 11–13, 17, 64–5, 74, 80, 83, 96, 101, 104, 115, 117, 133 n.5
blood 12, 71, 75, 136 n.6
Christ – crucifixion 11, 75
and the nation 3, 11–12, 73, 76, 114, 125
and victimhood 2, 8–9, 12, 17
war-making 11
Said, Edward 4
saint(ly) 7, 29–32, 34
salvation 2, 8–10, 14, 17, 104, 112, 116–17, 131
Samsung 125, 127
Schmitt, Carl 1–2, 21, 41, 43–4, 46, 51, 55, 68–9, 83–4, 104, 122–3
science 3, 81, 94
Scott, Rachelle 14, 112
Second World War 8, 81, 125
secular 1–5, 8–9, 11, 14–15, 18–21, 27, 35–9, 44, 48, 53, 55–7, 68, 70, 76, 83, 85, 103–4, 120–3
secularisation 24, 62, 122
secularism 1, 37, 121
Shia *see* Islam
Singapore 3, 11, 14
sociology 7, 18–20, 25–6, 32, 134 n.2, 135 n.3
South Asia *see* Asia, South
South Korea *see* Korea, Republic of
Southeast Asia *see* Asia, Southeast
sovereignty
immanent 2
of the (individual) self 7, 52, 54
Islamicate 28, 30–1, 38
Leviathan 19, 29
popular 13, 21, 104, 106, 117
state 2, 15, 27–8, 35, 37, 42–4, 69, 82–4, 105, 107
transcendent 3, 5, 7, 108, 112–13
spiritual 3, 10, 23, 29, 41–2, 45–7, 62, 94, 96, 115, 124–6, 134 n.6
nationalism 10, 119, 123–6
state *see* kingdoms; nation-state; theatre state
Sufism *see* Islam
Suharto, Haji Mohammad 16
sultanate 6, 42
Sunni *see* Islam
supernatural 4, 16, 75–6, 123
sutras 41, 46, 48, 134 n.4, 6

Tambiah, Stanley 6, 15, 76
Tanzania 61
teleology 13, 44
Thailand 15–16, 68–85, 104–18
Thaksin Shinawatra 72, 106, 113
theatre state 6
therapeutic 121, 131–2
theological issues 2–3, 57, 68
theo-political 3–5, 87
theos 4, 109, 133 n.6
see also political theology

Tilak, Bal Gangadhar 50–2
transcendence 2, 8–11, 17, 47–8, 55, 85
truth 2, 11, 41, 51, 81–2, 91
  inner 27
  universal 3
Twelver Shia *see* Islam
Tzu Chi 10

'*ulama*' 29, 32–3, 93
United Nations (UN) 16, 40, 42, 48, 110
United States 3, 10, 80, 120, 130
universal(ity) 3, 9–11, 28, 30, 36, 64–5, 77, 84

Vejajjiva, Abhisit 72
victim(hood) 2, 8–9, 12, 17, 57, 103
violence 11–12, 21, 24, 51, 75, 83, 99, 133 n.5, 135–6 n.2
  against enemies 3
  non-violence 78
  state 3, 11, 68
  war-making 44–5
visual culture 87–8

waqf 33–4, 38, 63
wealth 11–13, 33–4, 45, 61, 107, 111–13, 116
Weber, Max 19–28, 33, 43–4, 112
Weddle, David 11, 133 n.5
West (the) 4, 7, 17, 22, 41, 52–3, 55, 71, 101, 120, 125, 132, 139 n.16
Westphalia 33, 35–9, 139 n.16
  East of 4, 7, 18–19, 35
World Bank 81
Wydra, Harald 2–3, 55, 68, 85, 106

yoga
  hatha 42, 47–8
  karma yoga 7, 48, 50–4
  International Yoga Day 40
  Natha 42
  see also political theology, of yoga
YOLO (You Only Live Once) 130

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